

The Methodist resolution, passed April 19, ordered a General Conference delegation to Washington to urge executive "restraint" in attempts to free the hostages and to encourage President Carter to promote "reconciliation" between the American and Iranian peoples. It was drafted after a speech by Bishop C. Dale White of New Jersey, who had visited Iran, though not the hostages, last December with an ad hoc clergy group. Bishop White was evidently impressed by the Ayatollah Khomeini, whom he met, and depressed by the lingering effects of the shah's regime. Iranians are angry at America because, he said, "they believe that a bankrupt U.S. foreign policy kept the cruel dictator in power...and that rapacious U.S. interests siphoned off their oil money and ruined their economy." The bishop touched a responsive chord—most likely the easily touched chord of Protestant guilt—in a majority of the thousand General Conference delegates. Subsequent conference expressions on the Iranian crisis generally reflected White's opinion that U.S. Christians should try to understand the anger vented in the embassy takeover.

A sense of urgency mingled with euphoria in the Indianapolis convention center when Carter agreed to receive the Methodist callers, putting out the welcome mat for a group soliciting "utmost patience" from a commander-in-chief who, only days earlier, had projected "some sort of military action" if sanctions failed to bring speedy release of the captives. Making it even sweeter for the Methodists, Walter Cronkite read the delegation's mandate on the evening news!

Off the delegation flew, first to meet in New York on April 23 with Iran's representative to the United Nations and then to the White House. Along with an appeal for his government's cooperation in "reconciliation," Ambassador Monsour Farhang received a message for Khomeini from the General Conference. "We...hear the agonies of your people;...their cries for freedom from foreign domination, from cultural imperialism, from economic exploitation," said the Methodists.

Back in Indianapolis on April 24 the delegation waited for the president's formal response before reporting to the conference, and when it came, the words from the Rose Garden were not those the would-be reconcilers wanted. Though no one knew it then, Carter's message was totally congruent with his decision to authorize the ill-fated rescue attempt already in the countdown stage when he had greeted the Methodist delegation. His two key sentences read: "The United States has explored every avenue to find a peaceful solution to this crisis....We have offered the hand of peace and friendship to the people of Iran, but the kind of relationship of mutual respect which we seek cannot develop while innocent Americans are being held prisoners."

Delegation spokesmen were hesitant to tell the conference straight out that their mission was basically unproductive. Before reading the presidential message Bishop William Cannon of Georgia said: "I want this body to know that President Carter is a committed Christian." Even though the president's response had an impatient tone, had he not cordially welcomed the Methodists and thanked them for coming? "It was a real privilege to go with this delegation to visit with the president," said D. W. Brooks, another prominent Georgian and a major Carter backer. Brooks told the conference his friend had already practiced more restraint than other presidents would have.

The news on the morning of April 25 cast a pall over the General Conference. Given the president's message and the fact that the failed rescue effort was not a military invasion of Iran, the peace-seeking Methodists could not

really feel betrayed. Yet many did, or at least felt embarrassed. Why, they wondered, had Carter bothered with their delegation after he had decided on a rescue strike that could have touched off war? Why had they indulged in euphoria just because a president noticed the denomination?

Aware that it had lost the public spotlight on Iran, the General Conference nonetheless reaffirmed its appeal for restraint, asked Carter to assure the Iranians that "we honor their national independence," and, for the first time as the official United Methodist voice, asked Iran to send the hostages home. "In the sorrow of the moment we celebrate the gifts of grace and hope and pray for new beginnings," were the United Methodists' last words on Iran before their conference adjourned.

One wonders whether the clergy and laity elected to run America's churches mightn't do more good for the world by hope and prayer than by sending resolutions to Washington.

Elliott Wright is a Journalist.

EXCURSUS 3

John Tessitore on BREAKFAST OF OLYMPIC CHAMPIONS

Monday morning, 7:45. In front of me sits a bowl of noisy Rice Crispies, yet each time I pick up my spoon I drop it, bored. What good's all this noise, I think, without a little fruit? Then my eye falls upon a lone banana lying atop the refrigerator. I can see it is entering its final stages of decline, but my elation will not be abated. My salivary glands come alive; the cacophony of snap, crackle, pop rises to a triumphant crescendo. Only after I have peeled and sliced the yellow treasure do I notice a small red, white, and blue sticker affixed to its exterior. For a moment I gaze uncomprehendingly, but soon the truth dawns: I am eating an Official Olympic Banana.

My first response is cynical: Apparently not even nature's own banana is safe from the long arm of the Olympic Committee. Slowly, though, another thought eases its way into my consciousness. Maybe, just maybe, there's more here than one first suspects. I mean, suppose there really *is* something special about Olympic food. Suppose it wasn't the Wheaties but all those Olympic bananas on top that propelled Bruce Jenner higher and farther and faster than all the other guys! Not the bananas alone, of course—but imagine a combination of all the foods that make their way to the tables of the U.S. Olympic teams. Why, the effect could be tremendous! "You are what you eat," we are told (by whom, I forget). Doesn't it follow then that to eat Olympic food is to become an Olympian? I resolve to find out.

Walking to the subway some half-hour later, I feel a slight, unfamiliar bounce to my step. Might this be the first sign? I move with redoubled vigor. Once on the platform I steal furtive glances at my fellow commuters. How to describe the sensation as I bear witness to this array of physical imperfection? It is something approaching horror! Have they always appeared to me so, I wonder, or is this too a manifestation of the new me? Keeping very still, I listen for the metabolic changes I suspect are taking place at this very moment, but a subway platform is too noisy for a proper study of internal medicine.

Yet my theory is appearing more credible by the minute. Passing a newsstand, I am unaccustomedly drawn to *Sports Illustrated*, *Ring Magazine*, the *Times* (Sports Monday), and something new entitled (prophetically?) *Olympic*. Even as I enter the office I can feel a charge in the atmosphere, can sense, for instance, that the receptionist is regarding me with heightened attention.

"Hold my calls this morning, Gloria," I say, smoothly easing out of my jacket. Once behind closed doors I begin to devour my little pile of literature, noting in particular the advertisements for Official Olympic Food. The morning races by and leaves me strangely famished. I think about asking Gloria to call out for my lunch but I check myself. No, this is something I will have to do on my own.

Slipping into the corner dell, I wait till the crowd thins out, then seize my chance.

"Say, you got any Official Olympic sandwiches?" I hold my breath. For an interminable second I am gripped by silent terror...waiting for the laugh, the sneer, perhaps even the order to leave. But there is nothing of the sort.

"Why, sure," comes the friendly reply, "sure we got Olympic sandwiches. What kind ya want?"

Ah, how foolish I was to worry. Of course this man understands: He's a Greek.

"Give me something international, will you."

The counterman smiles knowingly, and with great skill assembles Italian cheese and Polish ham with Russian dressing on Lithuanian rye. I grab an Official Olympic chocolate drink (vitamin D fortified) and a discus-shaped donut. As the Greek hands me my sandwich he assures me the pickle's the real thing. "The Israelis love 'em."

I return to my office, a morning's work left undone. But it is no use; I can think of nothing but the vast storehouse of energy that my once average body has become, of the remarkable feats it yearns to perform.

"I'm leaving early today," I tell Gloria, pretending not to notice how her eyes drink me in. "See you in the morning." I am off to the United Nations Hotel to use their Olympic-size pool. Ah, here is what I need! world enough and time enough to give vent to power I can no longer restrain. Plunging into the cool water, I prepare to swim a lap for each nation of the world—a truly apolitical, Olympian gesture. Surely, I think, not even President Carter could fault my intentions. After four laps it occurs to me that I might revise my plan to one lap per continent without risk of offending anyone.

But so far I have been only dabbling. The really big test lies yet before me: dinner. I resolve that my theory, if it is to be proven once and for all, must be pushed to the limit. A trip to the supermarket is imperative. Once in the door I grab instinctively for a hand basket, but, no, this evening one of those big shiny carts is more the thing. Slowly moving through the aisles, I scan each shelf for the tiny red, white, and blue crest, that cachet of ineffable power. Aha! An attractive tin of corned-beef hash is the first item to find its way into my bin. Soon, though, it is joined by others: Official Olympic ziti, Official Olympic re-fried beans, Official Olympic frozen fish fillets...the list goes on. Water chestnuts, grape juice, pickled herring, dried cashews; Official Olympic gorgonzola and an equally sanctioned sherbet slide in next to a pomegranate—all destined to become an Olympian dessert. The cart grows full, yet I can push it with ease. Once through the checkout counter I make a single, final stop. By a great piece of luck my local wine merchant has in his cellar the very Bordeaux so dear to the French relay team. At last my repast is complete.

It is some while later. From the kitchen to the dining room table there stretches such a trail of rubble that one

might suppose Titans had dined in Manhattan. Pushing away from the table, I am beset by buckling knees, a merciless throbbing at the temples, and volcanic inner tremors. I am beaten, I confess, my theory in ruins. Fortunately, the Olympic Committee—perhaps in anticipation of its own headaches—has overlooked nothing, and as I riffle through the medicine chest I find—thank God—the Official Olympic antacid. (Plop-plop.) Goodnight.

UPDATE: "Radical Chic With Guns"

In the June Worldview, Alexander Wilde asked, "Is Colombia on the Brink of Anything?"—a response to the recent takeover of the Dominican Republic's embassy in Bogotá. Among those interned for the sixty-one-day ordeal was U.S. Ambassador Diego C. Ascencio. On May 28, Mr. Ascencio visited CRIA and, in a lively conversation with guests, provided an "insider's" view of the event.

It was independence day for the Dominican Republic, and I was stopping in to say hello at the embassy before going on to lunch. That's when it all began.

A young couple, armed and well-dressed, walked through the doorway and began to fire at the ceiling. A shoot-out followed that lasted about thirty minutes and involved some 150 rounds. Sometime in that half-hour I recited the most sincere Act of Contrition of my life!

The guerrillas numbered sixteen in all. They forced me to shout for a cease-fire, and from then on things quieted down. Still, from the first day to the third I thought I was a dead man, and I resolved to go out with as much dignity as I could preserve.

Our captors were made up of three discernible groups: the hardened, doctrinal revolutionaries—very good with weapons, very well trained; young attractive university types, including women; and a small bunch of thugs who'd probably have otherwise been robbing a bank. Of course they were all Marxist and very pro-Castro, but over all they were rather typically middle class. Later, they started to feed me lines about the great American economic octopus. I said, "Wait a minute. I'm the son of a worker from New Jersey. You guys look pretty bourgeois to me!"

The guerrillas took over the embassy in order to demand freedom for 311 political prisoners and \$50 million, but even as they made this known they admitted their terms were completely negotiable. They were, one must admit, an unusually reasonable group of captors. For example, this was probably the first time hostages actively participated in negotiations for their release. In fact, we actually drafted the agreement between the guerrillas and the Colombian Government that ended the siege.

From the outset we hostages were instructed to elect a committee to represent us, of which I was a member, and for the next two months we never stopped talking. The dialogue between captors and captives was incessant. And I am of the strong belief that one should never cease to talk and to listen.

From a more self-serving standpoint, I cultivated a cordial basis with my captors with the idea that it would be harder for them to shoot someone they knew than a total stranger. Being myself Hispanic, I can generalize and say that while Hispanics can be harsh, they are not gratuitously cruel. Our treatment over two months bears this out.

The ordeal ended when the guerrillas settled on a guarantee that political prisoners would get good treatment and fair trials and that the Human Rights Commission and the Red Cross would be involved. Once convinced that this was an honorable solution, they sought only safe conduct out of the country, and we, the remaining hostages, were quickly brought home.