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28 May  
XI/1200

USSR  
LEBANON

SOVIET ATHLETIC TEAM TOURS MIDDLE EAST.

SOURCE ATHENS : Greek-Rumanian emigre in BEIRUT.  
DATE OF OBSERVATION: April 1954.  
EVALUATION COMMENT : None.

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A team of 25 Soviet weight-lifters and dumbbell manipulators visited BEIRUT during the last week of April in the course of a tour of the Middle East. The team gave two exhibitions at the Club de la Jeunesse before a fairly enthusiastic audience, but -- probably because of the limited appeal of their art -- the exhibitions received only scanty notice in the BEIRUT press. The group was lodged at the Biarritz Hotel, outside the city on the seacoast. The Soviet athletes were seen on the streets only once, on the day before their departure, when they went shopping in a group. Two attaches of the Soviet Legation accompanied them as interpreters.

During its brief visit the Soviet team was given two dinners by the Lebanese Athletic Confederation. A Lebanese who attended the dinners told our source that the dinner conversation of the team members consisted almost entirely of praise for the life led by athletes in the Soviet Union. The team members explained their failure to go sight-seeing in BEIRUT by saying that they had to stay in their hotel to keep in training.

Our source said that some of the team members did not appear in the exhibitions and were apparently accompanying the team as "observers"; one of them spoke Arabic. Another of the non-participants was an Arabic-speaking Armenian named TSIMINIAN, who was particularly active as a propagandist at the two dinners offered by the Lebanese sportsmen.

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Our source reported that when TSIMINIAN was asked why the Soviet weight-lifting champion did not go along on the tour, he replied that the champion had been excluded from Soviet sport for slapping a waiter in a MOSCOW restaurant. "In your country, perhaps," TSIMINIAN told his hosts, "this would not be a very serious matter and it would be the waiter who would suffer. But in the Soviet Union it is considered a crime."

Our source reported that admiring Lebanese Communists are spreading this story by word of mouth throughout BEIRUT, as a proof of the "democratic justice" which exists in the Soviet Union.

End.