

# THE GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY: ROMANIA'S POLITICAL MANIPULATION OF THE 1984 LOS ANGELES OLYMPIC GAMES

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In 1983 Romania suffered the worst blow to its international reputation owing to its human rights violations. In search of redemption, Romanian president Nicolae Ceausescu made overtures to the West. When these went unanswered he turned in desperation to the Soviet Union. However Ceausescu, a conservative Communist, was distrustful of Soviet leader Yuri Andropov, a "liberal reformer." But Ceausescu was as much an opportunist as he was a Communist. After the death of Andropov in February 1984, with the conservative Konstantin Chernenko in control Ceausescu felt more confident. Then, as the Soviet boycott movement against the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games evolved, he saw the opportunity to enhance his standing in the eyes of the world.

This study examines the political forces utilized by Ceausescu to manipulate the United States and the Olympic Movement, to increase his personal stature and Romania's economic position and international status. The investigation relies on a number of previously untapped sources. The most notable of these sources are U.S. Department of State documents, secured through the Freedom of Information Act, the personal recollections of former American and Romanian government officials and contributions by key Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee personnel.

On July 28, 1984 the Romanian Olympic team marched into the Los Angeles Coliseum during the opening ceremonies of the Games of the XXIIIrd Olympiad to a thunderous ovation by the 92,655 spectators in attendance. Both the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) felt that, in light of the Soviet led boycott, securing Romanian participation at the Games was a major coup. But who, in actuality, were the real directors in this melodrama - the Olympic organizers, or Ceausescu?

In the opening minutes of his report on the fall of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, "Death of a Dictator," newsman Ted Koppel stated that, "Truth, like most other commodities in Romania, has been in such short supply for so long that to this day conclusions are best treated as preliminary."<sup>1</sup> No other statement embodied recent Romanian history more. Romania under Nicolae Ceausescu was resplendent

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with riddles and contradictions. Perhaps the most under investigated riddle was the Romanian decision to participate in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games.

From the start of the Cold War in 1947-48 the United States had attempted to find the best policy with which to deal with the Communist world. The Eisenhower administration's effort to establish closer economic ties with the countries of Eastern Europe, especially Poland, was called "bridgebuilding." Faced with the appearance of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 Kennedy adopted a policy of "peaceful engagement" in which the United States would never recognize the permanent dominance of communism over Eastern Europe. And in the late 1960s and early 1970s Nixon's secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, developed the policy of "differentiation."<sup>2</sup>

The policy, set forth in National Security Decision Memorandum 212 on 2 May 1973,<sup>3</sup> essentially divided the Communist world into two camps, good and bad Communists. As a result the United States subsequently rewarded good Communists economically, and politically, for their actions against Soviet domination in hopes of inspiring other Eastern European regimes to resort to similar action. "Good Communists" were defined by the U.S. Department of State as:

... those [Warsaw Pact countries] which: (1) showed evidence of internal reform, human rights and emigration improvements, and/or liberalization domestically in terms of free enterprise and capitalistic incentives-initiatives; or which (2) took positions in foreign policy that differed from those of Moscow.<sup>4</sup>

The most visible "success" of the differentiation policy was Romania, "the maverick of Eastern Europe."

Soon after taking control Ceausescu began to test his wings. On January 31, 1967 Romania established diplomatic relations with West Germany; this was the first triumph of Chancellor Willy Brandt's program of openness to the Eastern bloc, "Ostpolitik." Ceausescu also established relations with Israel and travelled the world nurturing his personal image of himself as an international leader. Richard Nixon visited Romania as a private citizen in 1967, and then again in 1969 as the first American president to visit a Communist country since 1945. All this led Ceausescu towards being regarded at the West's "favorite Communist."

One reason that Ceausescu could practice an independent foreign policy such as this without incurring the wrath of Moscow was that he was still a committed

\* Eastern Europe, for the purposes of this paper, encompasses only the countries of the Warsaw Pact. In fact, these two terms will be used interchangeably to refer to the same group of countries. Yugoslavia and Albania, whereas geographically located in Eastern Europe proper, will not be included in this definition. Due to sharp political and ideological differences with Moscow shortly after World War II, they were traditionally not considered a part of the Soviet bloc during the period of the "Cold War."

communist that believed in a strong hand at home. As each new conquest brought added international recognition Ceausescu became increasingly more ruthless with his own population. As Brandt noticed, "They were naturally at pains, despite their boldly independent attitude, to avoid unnecessary clashes with 'Big Brother.'"<sup>5</sup>

Romania exaggerated its independence to benefit itself and the Warsaw Pact allies. As Ceausescu promoted and relished in his reputation as a maverick, he maintained strong ties with the Soviet Union and the rest of the Warsaw Pact. As Soviet-Romanian political expert Trond Gilberg<sup>6</sup> points out:

The Romanian emphasis on foreign policy autonomy in ideological matters as well as state policies represents not only a genuine concern, but also a well conceived set of image that appears to represent more independence than actually exists.<sup>7</sup>

Mircea Raceanu,<sup>8</sup> Chief of North American Affairs in the Romanian Foreign Ministry from 1974 to 1989, endorsed this belief.

Romania was not as independent from Moscow as President Nicolae Ceausescu wanted to project to the world. There are enough elements to prove the existence of collaboration between Bucharest and Moscow. At the same time to declare that all Romanian foreign policy (starting from 1958 when Soviet troops left Romania) was the product of Soviet-Romanian collaboration is, in my opinion, too much and contradicts reality.<sup>9</sup>

## ROMANIA AND THE SOVIET BOYCOTT

Before Premier Yuri Andropov's death from kidney failure on February 9, 1984, ironically during the Winter Olympic Games in Sarajevo, the Soviets, although voicing concerns on minor matters about the organization of the 1984 Games, steadfastly claimed they would participate in the Games of the XXIIIrd Olympiad in Los Angeles. However, representatives of the IOC and LAOOC noticed a marked difference in the Soviet attitude regarding participation following the death of the Soviet premier during the Winter Olympic Games in Sarajevo. After 72-year old Communist hardliner Konstantin Chernenko took control the question of Soviet participation became vague.

The Soviets answered that question with their boycott announcement of 8 May 1984. As would be expected the Warsaw Pact countries joined the boycott, albeit grudgingly. Romania, true to form as the "Maverick of Eastern Europe," didn't toe the party line.

Until the Soviet boycott announcement, Romania conducted a program of "business as usual" concerning the Games. Domestically, the Romanian media never mentioned the possibility of a Soviet boycott. As May 8 approached, and it became evident that Romania was not wavering in its stand on participation, reports of Soviet pressure began to circulate.

The first mention in Romania of a boycott came over Radio Moscow's Romanian service. The broadcast simply announced that the Soviets would not

attend the Games of the XXIIIrd Olympiad in Los Angeles.<sup>10</sup> Following the official Soviet announcement, the Romanian media conducted a news blackout on any mention of the Olympic Games. In response Radio Moscow increased broadcasts into Romania, attacking

the USA as being incompetent, hypocritical, and treacherous organizers of the games, who had produced the inevitable boycott by 'socialist states'; all of which was alongside, of course, praise for the Soviet stance in the context of bloc unity and its assistance to its allies.<sup>11</sup>

Radio Free Europe (RFE) announced that further Soviet pressure came during four meetings, held in six weeks from March 31 to May 14, between Soviet ambassador to Romania Yevgeniy Tyazhelnikov and Ceausescu. The meetings, according to RFE, were "described only as 'comradely', a euphemism that suggests a tough exchange of views."<sup>12</sup> The Western press saw the final meeting between Ceausescu and Tyazhelnikov, on May 14, as the first sign of Soviet pressure placed on Romania.<sup>13</sup> However former Romanian foreign ministry official Mircea Raceanu remembers the encounters in a different light:

The meetings between Ceausescu and Ambassador Tyajhelnikov [sic] of March 31, April 20, May 5 and May 14, should be viewed from the perspective of the high level meeting which took place between Ceausescu and Chernenko at the beginning of June 1984 concerning the overall relations between Romania and the Soviet Union, especially (involving) cooperation in the economic area, and not as related directly<sup>14</sup> to the Romanian attendance at the Los Angeles Olympic Games.

On May 5, 1984, following his first meeting with Tyazhelnikov, Ceausescu met with IOC president Samaranch who was in Bucharest to present a medal to former gymnast Nadia Comaneci. Samaranch and Ceausescu discussed the Soviet situation concerning the Los Angeles Games. Ceausescu apparently convinced Samaranch that he knew, three days before the official announcement, that the Soviets were definitely going to boycott. He also assured Samaranch that the Romanians would participate "regardless of whether or not the Soviets decide to stay away."<sup>15</sup>

Gradually media reports increased of the brave stand taken by Romania in the face of mounting Soviet pressure. But never, in any press report, was the type of pressure explained.<sup>16</sup> In fact, when asked more than once, Romanian officials denied that they were under any pressure.<sup>17</sup> The Romanians themselves helped build such suspense by withholding any comment on what their decision would be until the last minute. As an official of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs told American Embassy staff, "It would serve no Romanian interest to declare its intentions earlier."<sup>18</sup>

One group that believed Romania was, in fact, under intense Soviet pressure was the LAOOC. Peter Ueberroth, LAOOC president, met with Alexander Siperco, IOC vice president from Romania, at Siperco's request on May 18 in Lausanne. The next

day the IOC Executive Committee would be meeting to discuss the boycott with LAOOC and Soviet officials.

One of the poorest nations in the Eastern bloc, Romania was largely dependent for its existence on its Socialist allies . . . Siperco . . . was reluctant to ask for financial help, even though his country now needed it. Romania had counted on East Germany to provide the transportation for its athletes and equipment, specifically rowing shells and canoes . . . .<sup>19</sup>

During the Executive Committee meeting, Siperco left the room to take a phone call from Bucharest. According to Ueberroth,

Moments later... [Siperco] returned, gathered his belongings, and made a quiet farewell to Samaranch before leaving in tears. Samaranch said Siperco had been summoned home by his government, which was being leaned on by the Soviet Union to boycott the Games.<sup>20</sup>

News of Siperco's unexpected departure spread rapidly through the international media. Later Siperco said he regretted the "press reports indicating that he was 'totally broken' by the summons . . . . This was not the case, he said, and it 'made a bad impression' in Romania."<sup>21</sup>

True to its policy of differentiation, the Reagan administration attempted to entice Romania into independent action. President Reagan sent a letter to Ceausescu, just before the Romanian Olympic announcement, stating that he was recommending a year extension to Romania's Most Favored Nation (MFN) status and "extending the bilateral commercial agreement" for an additional three years. As a final thought, he dissolutely extended his wish "that the Romanian Olympic team will participate in the games this summer."<sup>22</sup> Although the letter only spent one paragraph discussing the topic, its sole intention was "to encourage Romanian Olympic participation in part by stressing the progress achieved in many areas of our bilateral relations over the past year."<sup>23</sup> Once again in less than five years an American president saw fit to interject politics into the Olympic Movement.

Not everyone in the United States foreign service felt that it was in America's best interest for Reagan to encourage Romanian participation. For example, in a secret telegram to the U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz, the United States' ambassador to Romania, David Funderburk, believed it was playing into Ceausescu's hands to advocate his defiance of the Soviet boycott.

Ceausescu knows perfectly well what the U.S. wants him to do, and he knows what a beating his 'independent' image is going to take if he knuckles under to Chernenko. It is [in] our view not only superfluous, but ill-advised for the U.S. to importune Ceausescu to do something he is probably going to do anyway. We believe it is the Romanian game plan to get as much as they can out of a decision that will be made on criteria to which a letter from the U.S. will be irrelevant. If he goes to Los Angeles, as we think he will, excellent.

We have invested nothing, and Ceausescu's petard gets a workout. If he yields to irresistible Soviet pressure or inducements, better not have a failed U.S. effort to turn him around on the record.<sup>24</sup>

Raceanu's remembrance of Ceausescu during this period supports Funderburk's position.

President Nicolae Ceausescu, who was aware that boycotting the Games would badly damage his reputation as an independent leader, could not afford to make the decision of non-participation. At the same time, for tactical reasons (and not that he waited for an approval from Moscow), he considered that it was not necessary to announce Romania's decision from the beginning. He liked to be begged and also he wanted to get, at the right moment, as much as possible out of Romanian participation in the Los Angeles Olympic Games, including publicity.<sup>25</sup>

On May 24-25, five days after the IOC Executive Council meeting, sports officials from 11 Communist countries met in Prague to discuss the Los Angeles Games. As the meeting commenced, various delegates took turns attacking the LAOOC and its supposed lack of security for Communist athletes. In the middle of the attacks the Romanian minister of sports, Haralambie Alexa, announced that "Romania has always helped the Olympic movement and that he was making an official declaration that Romania would attend the Los Angeles Olympic Games."<sup>20</sup> According to one diplomatic source, the announcement,

. . . was greeted by stunned silence from those attending the meeting, and was followed by a request for a five-minute adjournment which ran on for a half hour. Upon resumption of the meeting, the GDR representative took the floor and strongly criticized the Romanian decision. . . However, this was the only speech to do so and no other delegations, including the Soviets, thereafter made reference to the Romanian decision. Informally, the Czechoslovaks later complained to the Romanians that their decision to participate would make it more difficult to explain Czechoslovak non-participation to their own people.<sup>27</sup>

Afterwards Samaranch again supported the contention that Romania was not pressured at any time during the meeting. "It was a quite friendly meeting. There were no rough words and they were very kind. But it was not easy."<sup>28</sup>

Mircea Raceanu recalled that the decision to attend was never an issue in the Romanians' minds.

To my knowledge it was always accepted in high circles of Bucharest that Romania would take part in the Los Angeles Olympic Games. I remember well (in fact I was the interpreter of that meeting) when Counselor Edward Derwinski [U.S. State Department] asked, in May 1984, Romanian Foreign Minister, Stefan Andrei if

Romania would take part in the Los Angeles Olympic Games. He did not answer 'yes' or 'no,' but he smiled and replied that to his knowledge the Romanian athletes 'never stopped preparing for the Games.' In fact it was more than a positive reply. It meant that the question of participation was never in doubt in the Romanian leadership's mind.<sup>29</sup>

On May 29, five days after the Romanians announced their intention to participate, the LAOOC delegation that Ueberroth had promised Siperco traveled to Bucharest to meet with Romanian officials. Delegation leader Charles Cale, LAOOC vice-president in charge of sports, remembered that he had special instructions from Ueberroth. "Before we left Peter said, 'You make the deal, we want them there. We have to get them there. You do what you have to do to bring them.'"<sup>30</sup>

The Romanian hosts treated their guests like royalty, which helped the negotiations go smoothly. "Virtually everything the Romanians wanted was arranged."<sup>31</sup> The LAOOC and IOC agreed to pay \$60,000 each for two thirds of the cost of bringing the Romanian team to Los Angeles. The Romanians paid the other \$60,000 for their part of the \$180,000 cost of two charter flights on the Romanian state owned airline, Tarom.<sup>32</sup> Cale remembered that the Romanians used the threat of Soviet pressure to their advantage during the negotiations.

They told us that they were under tremendous pressure from the Soviets not to come. They said, 'A major problem for us is that we would be coming with Aeroflot in a shared situation with the GDR, the Poles, etc. All of a sudden we don't have hard currency and we want to come, but if you're going to have us you're going to have to get us there.'<sup>33</sup>

In addition to the \$60,000 LAOOC payment originally agreed to, Cale revealed that there were other perks delivered to the Romanians. The LAOOC chartered a cargo plane to transport the equipment of participating European countries. Each country paid a small portion of the cost of the charter, but to Cales' memory the Romanians did not have to pay. Following the Games, the LAOOC also acted as agent in selling equipment for the Romanians for hard currency.<sup>34</sup>

It was very clear . . . , having been there and seen the pitiful economic situation that they were faced with, that they were trying to use leverage as much as they could financially. I don't know in the overall scheme of things if we were over reaching or not, but we gave in on an awful lot of things. A lot of it was nickel and dime sort of things that really didn't make a difference to us or not. It was pretty important because at that juncture they were clearly our showpiece as far as the breaking of the boycott.<sup>35</sup>

## ROMANIAN FOREIGN RELATIONS, MAY-JULY, 1984

**I**t did not take long for Ceausescu to reap the rewards of his decision. The day following the Romanian announcement in Prague, Ueberroth wrote to U.S.

Secretary of State George Schultz urging the government to “kindly offer them every possible support and assistance.”<sup>36</sup> Romania’s payoffs were already being discussed by the Reagan administration. The State Department suggested the President’s intervention in many trade issues that concerned Romania.

Under the circumstances, and in support of our policy of differentiation toward the countries of Eastern Europe, it is important for us to demonstrate that there are benefits for Warsaw Pact members who break with the Soviets. Regarding Romania, there are several longstanding export licensing cases which deserve prompt resolution.<sup>37</sup>

One case to be heard before the Export Administration Review Board (EARB) on 12 June 1984 was earmarked for special presidential attention.<sup>38</sup> Charles Hill, Executive Secretary-Department of State, wrote to White House adviser Charles McFarlane that, in light of Romania’s decision to attend the Games, “the outcome of that meeting assumes even greater importance in our relations with Romania and the President’s overall policy of trying to encourage greater distance between Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.”<sup>39</sup> A month later Romania was still looking for results. Following the start of the Games, a report to the Secretary of State stated that “Ceausescu is now looking for signals from the U.S., particularly approval for the long-standing Rom-Control Data exporting licensing case, which would keep the only U.S.-Romanian joint venture commercially viable.”<sup>40</sup>

Besides support for trade cases favorable to Romania, the administration strongly promoted the extension of MFN status for Ceausescu. This was an interesting stance since Ceausescu’s emigration tax threatened MFN only one year earlier (1983). At that time the United States renewed MFN when Ceausescu promised that the tax would not be enforced.<sup>41</sup> On June 1, 1984, eight days following the Romanian announcement on its participation in the Los Angeles Olympic Games, the United States once again renewed MFN for an additional year.

One case that did not go as Ceausescu, nor the State Department, wanted was the sale of Landsat satellite monitoring equipment to Romania. Landsat could detect objects on earth as small as 100 feet. The deal, originally proposed by Reagan in 1981, now gained renewed support by the Departments of State and Commerce. The Department of Defense opposed the sale because of the potential military benefits to the Warsaw Pact.<sup>42</sup> Former head of the Securitate, the Romanian secret police, Ion Mihai Pacepa “has said that the government of Romania had an agreement with Moscow on the transfer of Landsat technology.”<sup>43</sup> Because of the objections of Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, and of Ambassador Funderburk, the project did not go through.

By June, the State Department acknowledged that there was little doubt in its mind as to Ceausescu’s plans concerning Romanian Olympic participation. A secret Bureau of Intelligence and Research Analyses document dated June 19th, summarizing East European developments during the month of May, stated that,

Moscow may have tried to bring Bucharest on board, but it could not have been surprised that Ceausescu demurred. Ceausescu pre-

sumably expects to burnish Romania's independent image in the US and elsewhere in the world . . .<sup>44</sup>

On June 4, three days following the extension of MFN, Ceausescu traveled to Moscow for private meetings with Chernenko. The topic of conversation was the upcoming Comecon<sup>45</sup> summit, the first in 13 years. One reason given in the press for why there had not been a Comecon summit for that length of time was Romania's resistance to take part.<sup>46</sup> It seems unlikely then that, after 13 years of resistance, Romania would decide to choose this time, while defying the Soviets on a major foreign policy decision, to participate enthusiastically in a Comecon summit. *The (London) Times* claimed on May 26 that the real reason for the Ceausescu trip was that he was summoned "to Moscow for talks on Romania's refusal to join the Soviet Bloc boycott of the Olympic Games and other issues."<sup>47</sup> In reality, Romania had begun calling for a Comecon summit meeting in 1980, four years earlier. Ceausescu's visit to Moscow prior to

. . . the summit meeting had served the important if not main purpose of trying to find a common Romanian-Soviet platform for the summit talks; and it seems that Ceausescu agreed to adopt a constructive attitude at the summit meeting in exchange for rather vague promises of more Romanian-Soviet trade and industrial cooperation agreements.<sup>48</sup>

At the conclusion of the meeting, Chernenko awarded Ceausescu the Order of the October Revolution, one of the highest awards granted by the Soviet Union. Mircea Raceanu, citing Ceausescu's uneasiness with former Soviet leader Andropov, summed-up the meeting more succinctly. "I would characterize the meeting between Ceausescu and Cernenko [sic] in June 1984 as a good one, a step forward for improving the relations between Bucharest and Moscow."<sup>49</sup> During the Comecon summit, Romania, while agreeing with the need for more intra-bloc cooperation, again steadfastly held to the right of national sovereignty.<sup>50</sup>

Shortly after the Comecon summit, Ambassador Funderburk met with Dr. Teodor Popescu, the chief researcher at the Institute for the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. Popescu confided to Funderburk that Romanian policy toward Olympic participation was not as it seemed.

[Popescu] said Romania is to remain a channel to the West (despite its movement toward Moscow) and hence the Soviets early on agreed to the Romanians going to the Olympics; otherwise (the Romanians) they would have had no credibility at all in the West. . . . [Popescu] said Romania tried a policy of orientation westward during 1983 to gain economic aid and political support. It was not successful and together with Ceausescu's fear of a Solidarity type situation here, it was a reason for closer orientation toward Moscow beginning January 1984.<sup>51</sup>

By the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games on July 28, there were signs that some people began questioning the legitimacy of Romania's motivations.

Reports surfaced that members of the IOC speculated that Romania's participation might not be as dramatic politically as first thought. According to a Los Angeles newspaper reporter, one high ranking IOC official went so far as to suggest ludicrously that "the Soviets secretly wanted the Romanians to come, perhaps for reasons of attracting hard currency into Eastern Europe."<sup>52</sup> With the opening of the Games attention started to turn more to the impending competitions. But underlying the interest in athletics was still the motivation of Romanian participation.

## THE GAMES OF THE XXIIIrd OLYMPIAD, LOS ANGELES

**D**uring the opening ceremonies, it became apparent that the spectators, and especially the media, anticipated the entrance of the 127 member Romanian delegation in the parade of nations. As the Romanians entered the Coliseum, they received an ovation surpassed only by that for the American contingent.

It unquestionably meant a great deal to the Romanians. As their team paraded around the peristyle and onto the north straightaway of the Coliseum track, people sitting in those sections noticed that many of the Romanian athletes were crying with joy, overwhelmed by the crowd's reception.<sup>53</sup>

As the Games progressed, Romanian athletes gave inspired performances. The LAOOC had the television signal transmitted to a West European country, taped and sent into Romania for daily broadcast. Five hours of Olympic coverage were televised throughout Romania each evening.

Government broadcasters boasted that victorious Rumanians had 'dedicated' their victories to their President, or were inspired by (the) 40th anniversary of Rumania's liberation from fascism.<sup>54</sup>

In the total medal count, Romania placed third (53) behind the United States (174) and West Germany (59) and ahead of China and Yugoslavia, the two other communist countries competing, who had accumulated 9 and 7 medals respectively. Romania placed second only to the United States in gold medals, 20 to 83, edging out West Germany by three medals. Los Angeles was by far the greatest Olympic performance in Romanian history.

The Romanian team returned to Bucharest on August 14. Family members, sports and government officials, and fans met the team at the airport. Following the team's 1976 Olympic success, large crowds had greeted them at the airport and Ceausescu had personally awarded medals to many athletes at a majestic reception given by the Communist hierarchy. The athletes expected more this August day following the country's greatest Olympic showing. The welcome ". . . was cordial, but not the grandiose reception they had anticipated."<sup>55</sup> Later that evening, the "team" sent a telegram to Ceausescu, dedicating their victories to him.

We are happy and honoured to dedicate our victories at the most important international sports competition to you, comrade Nicolae Ceausescu, general secretary of the party, president of the Republic,

to the 40th anniversary of the antifascist and anti-imperialist revolution of the social and national liberation and to the great forum of Romanian Communists, the 13th congress of the party.<sup>56</sup>

On August 21, 1984, Romania celebrated the 40th anniversary of the overthrow of the Nazi puppet government. At the ceremony, Ceausescu conferred titles and awarded special medals to a multitude individuals for contributing to building Romania's "multilaterally developed socialist society."<sup>57</sup> Contrary to similar ceremonies following previous Olympic Games, nowhere in the lists of the occupations released did any mention of Romanian athletes, Olympians, or the general Romanian Olympic success, occur.

Romanian celebrations following the Los Angeles Olympics, the country's most successful sporting appearance to date, paled compared to the receptions held for any previous returning Olympic Team. It appeared that the Romanian Olympians had served their purpose, to show Ceausescu's regime in a positive light and curb anti-Romanian feelings around the world. As the closing ceremony's fireworks display echoed off into the distance, so did the value of Romania's Olympians.

A year after Romania's triumphs in Los Angeles, Ceausescu was still reaping the rewards of his decision to participate. During the summer of 1985 IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch traveled to Romania to present Ceausescu with the Olympic Order, the highest honor bestowed by the IOC, in recognition of his contribution to the Olympic Movement. It was an event that Samaranch may have regretted four years later during the overthrow of Ceausescu.<sup>58</sup>

People have criticized my awarding of the Olympic Order to Ceausescu, but that had nothing to do with any recognition of his domestic governing of the country, but the important action of breaking the boycott by the communist countries, which was something of paramount importance to the future of the Olympic Games.<sup>59</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

**O**f prime importance to the LAOOC, the IOC and the United States government was that the Soviet boycott of the Los Angeles Games be broken. Realizing the dire economic conditions that Romania was suffering from, the Reagan administration actively enticed Nicolae Ceausescu with trade inducements and a renewal of Most Favored Nation status. Ceausescu, ever the opportunist and experienced in securing Western economic support, saw an excellent opportunity to exploit the boycott situation to his and Romania's benefit. Although Romanian officials quietly denied that they were under Soviet pressure to join the boycott they exploited the rumors and innuendos in order to reap the financial and public relations rewards of playing the martyr. As one Romanian official replied when asked why his government was taking so long to make its Olympic decision, "It would serve no Romanian interest to declare its intentions earlier."<sup>60</sup>

Once again, in less than four years an American government, long proud of its stance of non-involvement in international sports, actively attempted to influence the

international Olympic Movement. The IOC also was guilty of ignoring its own claims of championing “the fundamental principals of universal ethics. in order to bring about a world of peace in respect for human dignity,”<sup>61</sup> by catering to one of the most despised dictators in history, Nicolae Ceausescu, and honoring him with their highest honor, the Olympic Order.

The question of Romanian participation has been accepted at face value without any reservations as to motivation. The reasons for this apathetic look at one of the most interesting events in Olympic history is based in the general ignorance of East European affairs, and more specifically Romania. An examination of events proves that once again, “Truth, like most other commodities in Romania, has been in such short supply for so long that to this day conclusions are best treated as preliminary.”<sup>62</sup>

## Notes

1. Ted Koppel, *The Koppel Report: Death Of A Dictator*, ABC-TV, April 2, 1990 (Koppel Communications, Inc., 1990).
2. For a detailed examination of United States foreign policy towards the Communist countries of Eastern Europe see Bennett Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges.. The United States and Eastern Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 1991).
3. Kovrig, 118.
4. David B. Funderburk, *Pinstripes and Reds* (Washington, D.C.: Selous Foundation Press, 1987), 28.
5. Willy Brandt, *People and Politics: The Years 1960-1975* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), 173.
6. Trond Gilberg is professor and head of the Department of Political Science at The Pennsylvania State University. He is the author of two books on Romanian politics in addition to being the author, editor and co-editor for numerous other studies on communism.
7. Trond Gilberg, *Nationalism and Communism in Romania: The Rise and Fall of Ceausescu's Personal Dictatorship* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1990) 209.
8. Mircea Raceanu, a 30-year veteran of the Romanian foreign service, was imprisoned for 11 months in 1989 after having been convicted of treason for allegedly spying for the U.S., Soviet Union and Israel. Ceausescu reportedly said that Raceanu “betrayed me personally.” Sentenced to death and awaiting execution, Raceanu was released from prison the day after the dictator’s downfall, December 23, 1989. Raceanu’s case was the first one of treason by a high government official in Ceausescu’s 24-year reign. Although a few scholars have voiced concerns about the validity of Raceanu’s observations I have found that, despite his personal feelings about Ceausescu, his contributions to this study through his letters and evaluations of government documents have been amazingly objective. In fact, on some occasions Raceanu has spoken favorably of some aspects of Ceausescu’s policies and character. For more detailed information on Raceanu’s experiences during his last year in Romania, see David Binder’s three articles, “Rumania Accuses One of Its Diplomats of Spying,” *New York Times*, 20 August 1989, L19; “The Old Guard in a New Government,” *New York Times*, 26 January 1990, All; and “Romanian Diplomat Pushed Into Exile in U.S.,” *New York Times*, 9 October 1990, A10.

9. Mircea Raceanu, letter to the author, 10 February 1992

10. Aurelia Leicand, "Romania and the Olympic Games," *Radio Free Europe Research: Situation Report*, Romania/9, 13 June 1984 (Washington, D.C.: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty), 6.

11. Leicand, 8.

12. Leicand, 8.

13. "Romania Delays Decision, Cuba Is Likely to Join Boycott Today," *Washington Post*, 23 May 1984, C5.

14. Mircea Raceanu, letter to author, 6 January 1992.

15. Department of State telegram from American Embassy in Bucharest to Secretary of State, 11 May 1984, subject: "Romanian Olympics Participation," 2.

16. The most prolific news reporter covering every aspect of the Los Angeles Games was *Los Angeles Times*' Kenneth Reich. Reich referred to Soviet pressure on Romania in many articles through the period prior to, and during, the Games. Following the Games he published a detailed account of the development of the Los Angeles Olympics [Kenneth Reich, *Making It Happen: Peter Ueberroth and the 1984 Olympics* (Santa Barbara, CA: Capra Press, 1986)]. In the 267 pages of text there was only one reference to Soviet pressure being exerted on the Romanians. "They (the Soviets) claimed it (the boycott) was not for political reasons, and they were not influencing others, even though they clearly influenced their satellites and sought to pressure the Romanians who, alone among the Warsaw Pact members, announced they would send their team to the Games" (p. 211).

17. Kenneth Reich, "Romanians on Peace Mission at L.A. Games," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 June 1984, I- 1.

18. Department of State telegram from American Embassy in Bucharest to Secretary of State, 14 May 1984, subject: "Romanian Participation in Los Angeles Olympics," 2.

19. Peter Ueberroth, *Made In America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1985), 289-290.

20. Peter Ueberroth, 291. (Although this story is recounted in a number of newspaper and magazine articles Ueberroth's description is used here because his was the only account from an eyewitness present at the meeting in question.)

21. Kenneth Reich, "Defiant Romania to Send Team: Bucks Soviet Pressure to Join Games Boycott," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 May 1984, 1.

22. Department of State Action Memorandum, 17 May 1984, Subject: "Proposed letter from the President to President Ceausescu of Romania."

23. Department of State Memorandum, 18 May 1984, from Charles Hill, Executive Secretary, to Robert C. McFarlane, White House; subject.: "Proposed Letter from President Reagan to Romanian President on Olympic Participation."

24. Department of State telegram from American Embassy in Bucharest to Secretary of State, Washington, D.C., 24 May 1984, subject: "Proposed Presidential letter to Ceausescu," 2.

25. Mircea Raceanu, letter to author, 10 February 1992.
26. Reich, "Defiant Romania. . .," 1.
27. Department of State telegram from American Embassy in Prague to Secretary of State, 5 June 1984, subject: "Romanian Decision to Attend Olympic Games," 1-2.
28. "Rumania Decides to Take Part in Games," *New York Times*, 25 May 1984, A3.
29. Mircea Raceanu, letter to author, 10 February 1992.
30. Charles Cale, telephone interview, 2 March 1993.
31. Reich, *Making It Happen*, 230.
32. Kenneth Reich, "LAOOC, IOC Helped to Pay for Romanians' Trip," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 July 1984, I-3.
33. Cale, 2 March 1993.
34. Charles Cale, telephone interview, 8 March 1993.
35. Cale, 8 March 1993.
36. Letter from Peter V. Ueberroth to George P. Schultz, 25 May 1984, contained in Department of State Action Memorandum from Edward J. Derwinski to George P. Schultz, Secretary of State, 30 May 1984.
37. Department of State Memorandum for Robert McFarlane, The White House, from Charles Hill, Executive Secretary; Subject: "Romania's Decision to Attend the Olympics - The U.S. Response," 4 June 1984.
38. Participants involved in EARB cases are kept strictly confidential to ensure the accuracy of information supplied by companies seeking arbitration before the EARB. Repeated attempts to discover the companies involved in the 12 June 1984 EARB hearing proved fruitless.
39. Department of State Memorandum for McFarlane from Hill, 4 June 1984.
40. Department of State Information Memorandum to The Secretary, from Richard Burt, subject: "Romania: Ceausescu Looks to the U.S.," 26 July 1984.
41. Nelson, 213.
42. "Rumanian Landsat Use Seen: Defense Dept. Opposes Sale," *New York Times*, 28 June 1984, D24.
43. Funderburk, 46.
44. "East European Highlights: May 1984," Bureau of Intelligence and Research Current Analyses, U.S. Department of State, 19 June 1984, 3.
45. Comecon is also known as the CMEA, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. The organization is the coordinating economic body for Warsaw Pact nations. The theory is to coordinate each country's economic policy so that they all work together for the common good of the Pact.

46. Richard Owen, "Chernenko refuses to separate cruise from other arms issues," *The (London) Times*, 5 June 1984, 6.
47. Richard Owen, "Ceausescu 'summoned to Moscow over Games,'" *The (London) Times*, 26 May 1984, 1.
48. Anneli Maier, "Romanian Reaction to the CMEA Summit Meeting," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Situation Report*, Romania/10, 17 July 1984, 13.
49. Mircea Raceanu, letter to the author, 10 February 1992.
50. Anneli Maier, 15-16.
51. State Department telegram from American Embassy in Bucharest to Secretary of State, Washington, D.C., 7 June 1984, subject: "Romanian decision to attend Olympic Games: Soviets and Romanians move closer together," classification: Secret. (NOTE: The document in question has the Romanian source's name excised for security reasons. In a letter to the author, dated 17 September 1992, Dr. Funderburk mentioned "this document does refer to the conversation I had with Dr. Teodor Popescu." The "Solidarity type situation" mentioned is a reference to the Solidarity movement in Poland that ultimately led to the downfall of that country's communist government. Ceausescu's intense fear of internal revolt has been verified by many sources. Prophetically, a popular uprising ultimately did lead to Ceausescu's demise.)
52. Kenneth Reich, "For Romanians, Gold Medals Came Second," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 August 1984, I-7.
53. Reich, *Making It Happen*, 230.
54. Lloyd Garrison, et al., "Rise of an East Bloc Maverick: Rumania finds splendor in solitude," *Time*, 20 August 1984, 75.
55. "Return Home of Olympic Team Downplayed," (Mainz ZDF Television Network broadcast, 14 August 1984, 5:45pm GMT) *FBIS: Daily Report*, Eastern Europe, 16 August 1984, Vol. II, No. 160, H-1.
56. "Olympic Squad Sends Telegram to Ceausescu," *FBIS: Daily Report*, Eastern Europe, 17 August 1984, Vol. II, No. 161, H- 1.
57. "Ceausescu Awards Medals," *FBIS: Daily Report*, Eastern Europe, 23 August 1984, Vol. II, No. 165, H-1.
58. David Miller, *Olympic Revolution: The Olympic Biography of Juan Antonio Samaranch* (London: Pavilion Books Limited, 1992) 130.
59. Miller, 90.
60. Department of State telegram from American Embassy in Bucharest to Secretary of State, 14 May 1984, subject: "Romanian Participation in Los Angeles Olympics," 2.
61. Raymond Gafner, editor, *The Olympic Movement* (Lausanne, Switzerland: International Olympic Committee, 1987) 9.
62. Koppel.