

## Athletics: Integral Part of Communist Regimes

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In his *Capital*, Volume I, Marx wrote that "The education of the future" will be "an education that will, in the case of every child over a given age, combine productive labor with instruction and gymnastics, not only as one of the methods of adding to the efficiency of production, but as the only method of producing fully developed human beings."

In his *instructions to the German Delegation of the International Workingmen's Association in Geneva*, 1886, Marx advocated: "First, intellectual training, as given in the schools of gymnastics and in military training;..."

An eyewitness account of Leninist education by Sidney and Beatrice Webb left this impression: "Daily physical exercises become a social obligation," and: "It is not only for the exercises of their occupation that schooling has to prepare them, they have to be trained for life itself."

We can see from the above that education for the Communist founders was concerned with developing the "whole man" and that developing the physical body was a definite part of this.

When it comes to training the physical body, probably no two societies of the world are as well organized for this purpose as are those of the Soviet Union and East Germany. The Russian formula for producing Olympic champions has been characterized as: "Find them young, train them hard, plan everything in advance." Talented children, 6-12 years of age, are selected from out of the public school system and placed in one of 36 state-subsidized sports clubs spread throughout the country. The admittance tests to all the clubs are strict and no doubt have to be, for "There is room in these clubs for just 4 percent of the nation's children." Even 2 and 3 year old children are undergoing training, the aim being "to inculcate the sporting culture in them, so that the drive for sports becomes something organic that is beyond their control."

The young athletes are screened annually at the sports clubs, with the best performers given the opportunity to attend one of the state's 32 special sports boarding schools known as "Olympic Reserve" schools. A remarkably successful program in East Germany was the model for this additional level of intensification, begun by the Soviet Union in 1962. There are also sports schools in the Soviet Union, of which there are some 5,000 in the country attended by more than 1,800,000 children under the tutelage of 47,000 coaches.

"If a child is not convincingly talented at an early age or does not have a relative who is a sportsman or wields influence elsewhere, he will be passed over." This almost happened to Zebinisso Rustamova, who went on to become the Soviet Archery champion.

A child who is not a promising athlete may turn to the Pioneer Clubs for after-school recreation, but they too have entrance requirements involving ability, academic standing and membership in the Communist youth organization. A final sweep for young talent is made in the Spartakiad, an internal Olympics, of which it is said that 45 million "youths" participated in 1971.

A similar organizational structure exists in East Germany. Compulsory physical education classes, amounting from two to three hours a week are taken by every East German schoolchild, beginning with the first grade.



There are 21 sports clubs situated in major cities around the country, as well as 19 specialized sports schools. It was to such a school, the Championship Chemie Club in Halle, where Kornelia Ender was sent at age 11. There this future gold medal (4 during the 1976 Summer Olympics) winner would swim six to seven miles a day in the pool reserved for champion athletes.

Only those students who have demonstrated superior athletic ability are admitted to membership in the state-run 'clubs', besides being the only way of being assured a spot on an Olympic team. "Unless you go to one of the champion clubs," said Wolfgang Thier, a coach in Halle, "you simply cannot attain Olympic standards." The clubs, have perhaps 12,000 athletes, from which pool the East Germans select their Olympians. Those who are younger usually attend the specialized schools located on the premises which for some youngsters means living a life away from their family beginning perhaps as early as their 6th year. While sports is mandatory in the educational system, becoming an Olympic champion is not an obligation; therefore, children are not required to remain at the specialized schools if they choose not to do so.

The entire sports training structure in East Germany is highly developed, with all the latest scientific techniques and equipment being used and no expense spared in an effort to make East Germany the world's leader in sports.

East Germany's scientific and medical sports bureau in Leipzig extends over fourteen acres, with a staff of 900, of whom 400 are scientists. It has a budget of \$500,000 a year.

Dr. Alois Mader, who before his escape with his family to West Germany had been a physician at the Leipzig Institute of Sports, offered that "The East German results are due to the G.D.R.'s lead in the field of biology. Their training is medically checked and the most severe muscular tests are carried out on carefully selected athletes." What about the use of drugs in this training? Dr. Mader also had this to say: "Before they were prohibited by the International Olympic Committee, steroids were given to the athletes twenty minutes before a contest. These have a relaxing effect on the competitors and give them a sense of security." Despite strong official denials that drugs are not used, rumors persist. Dr. Mader feels that the use of steroids (if in fact they are still being used) is probably rare. "What the East Germans have perfected," Dr. Mader said, "is not so much magic pills or shots as truly scientific training programs in sports from swimming to rowing to the shotput event."

Prof. Kurt Tittel, the head of East Germany's scientific and medical sports bureau, when asked about anabolic steroids, replied that "We have developed our athletes without recourse to anabolics, but the International Congress of Physical Activity Sciences will be considering this problem before the 1980 Olympics."

The East Germans are very reluctant to release information concerning their scientific research in the area of sports. Reporters visiting the Leipzig Institute of Sports were hurriedly hustled along and not given time to closely examine its more interesting aspects on the ground that "the program directors don't have time." And when the same people asked to visit a particular large locked building, which they were told was a research institute, they were told: "No. Because research is going on there and we can't give out information about it." And when asked if they could visit a sports boarding school (this was while they were in another part. of the country), they were told by Lothar Eichor-Bayern, the district sports adviser in Zella-Mehlis, a small town in Thuringia, that this was impossible, because "You understand, we do

research there, experiments that we are not eager to have revealed."



Sixty percent of the East German population are engaged in sports. There are 8,000 factory sports clubs in the nation. A prerequisite toward getting into the expensive championship sports system is loyalty to, if not actual membership in the Communist party. Because swimming is compulsory, virtually every child is proficient in at least two strokes by the second grade. Working at least part time as coaches or sports officials are more than 300,000 East Germans, or nearly 5 percent of the labor force. The East German Gymnastics and Sports Federation numbers 2.66 million members.

Starting from practically ground zero, the Soviet Union has made tremendous increases in sports participation, to the point where 50,000,000 people were participating by 1967. By this time the Soviet Union was spending more than \$2.2 billion annually on athletics. Among the leading participant sports are track and field with 9 million participants, volleyball, with over 7 million people playing, soccer, almost 5 million, and basketball, with over 4 million people taking to the courts.

The Lenin Stadium in Moscow and the Kirov Stadium in Leningrad each hold over 100,000 spectators. Besides the financing provided by the state, trade unions as well as the various offices, factories and farms which equip sports clubs help provide for Soviet sporting activities. To be a member of the above-mentioned sports clubs costs the individual only 30 kopecks a year.

The East Germany Communist Party Boss Erich Honecker has called for world champion athletes who will perform "for the glory of our socialist homeland." And sport is specifically invoked in the East German Constitution, as essential to "development of a socialist personality." There are certainly some athletes who express this sentiment. Rosewitha Krause, a 27 year old student and a handball and swimming champion feels that "Every athlete has a duty to be politically engaged, the same as everyone else in the republic." Added Christian Brehmer, one of her teammates, "When I run, the first thing in my mind is the aim of strengthening the international reputation of the German Democratic Republic." The athletes who are most often held up as clean-living models for young people are those belonging to the ruling Socialist United (Communist) Party. Another point of view in contrast with the above expressions was given when reporter J. Kirshenbaum and Photographer Walter Looss, Jr. found themselves seated at a lunch table at a restaurant in the city of Karl-Marx-Stadt, otherwise known as Chemnitz. There they met a young woman whose ex-boyfriend was one of the nation's leading athletes until his recent retirement. She freely told them that "At his sports club he had to be in bed at 10 o'clock, as if he were a child. If we wanted to be alone together, it had to be in the morning. When he was left off the team for Munich, he went on vacation to the Baltic and refused to watch the Olympics on TV. You see, sports here is very important. There is great prestige in it. And, of course, the top athletes receive money and free cars. "Lowering her voice, she continued, "In fact, sport is too important here. There is a very popular expression in the G.D.R. that sums it up: Sport is Mord -- sport is murder."

To be sure, the champions of sport in East Germany and the Soviet Union are handsomely rewarded, definitely a motivational impetus. For example, the East German Gold Medalist in swimming, Miss Ender, is assured of receiving a college preparatory high school diploma, a privilege granted to fewer than 22,000 students a year. She and her fiance, Roland Matthes, also a swimming champion, can get a new

apartment when they want it and a new car without having to wait the normal eight years. After ski jumper Hans Georg Aschenbach won a gold medal in the 70-meter jump at the 1976 Winter Games, he was promoted to 1st Lt. in the East German army. And after the Olympics, the then Soviet Defense Minister, rewarded 11 of the athletes who were members of the armed forces by promoting them ahead of schedule.

The distinctions which we make here in the West between the amateur and the professional athlete simply do not exist for the leading athletes in the Soviet Union and East Germany. Many of the athletes in both these countries do almost nothing else other than practicing their sports.

The Soviet athlete need not fear losing his job because of absences due to his training or competition, and his salary continues while he is away. When he is no longer participating directly in competition the Soviet athlete can virtually count on being able to coach or having some other position in sports.

Soviet athletes are able to continue their studies while engaged in sports. They may extend the normal four-year institute or university course to seven years and go on to graduate work that may take them into their early thirties. As education is free and government stipends can always be had, the Soviet athlete can marry and raise a family, something which many American amateurs find impossible to do. In contrast to the United States, the Soviet Union never has a problem fielding the best available team. There is no hassle trying to obtain funds from private sources; there is no apprehension that the best of each year's talent will turn professional.

Favoritism towards athletes is a fact of life for sports participants in both the Soviet Union and East Germany. "Among Western purists it amounts to 'professionalism;' among party members it is another example of the state's offering of 'possibilities' to all men. Soviet officials point out that athletes receive no more than other 'contributive specialists,' and, in fact, less, because sports competition is only an avocation."

Certainly, the fact that both the Soviet and East German societies put so much into their athletic programs while athletes in the United States have to rely primarily on voluntary support is an obvious advantage to the former. According to one U.S. Olympic official, about 50 percent of the top athletes in the United States drop out of sports competition after they finish college because they cannot afford to continue for lack of some kind of subsidy.

For international competition to be fairly conducted, at least two other points bear mentioning. The U.S. government, too, could get much more involved in supporting organized athletic programs. This should be done with the cooperation of concerned officials on all levels of society. It should be voluntary in as far as it is possible to have a voluntary program, but the national government should be prepared to help subsidize this program and help to provide an impetus or incentive for people to stay on in sports. Present programs such as the President's Council on Physical Fitness are woefully inadequate. The U.S. Olympic Committee is financed by voluntary contributions. Last year, for the first time, this committee paid the expenses of athletes who are invited to Olympic tryouts, and some compensation is now given athletes (Olympic team members) who experience a loss of income.

Also, the whole concept of "amateurism" in international competitions has to be changed! We should allow all the best athletes, regardless of whether or not they have played on professional teams, to participate in the Olympics and other international competition. No one who plays with a professional athletic team or is otherwise engaged in sports as a professional in the United States, is allowed to participate in the Olympics or other international meets, whenever the rules specify that only "amateurs" may take part.

## **Conclusion**

That the Soviets and the East Germans are doing a lot to improve the athletic skills of their peoples, there is no doubt. But to what end? It is obvious that athletes are being used to serve ideological purposes (as well as nationalistic ends). In this respect, what is being done in the area of sports cannot be divorced from the ideological struggle as it is being carried on in the political, military, economic and other spheres.

And neither can athletics be separated from what we hold to be man's place in the universe. For the Communist, it centers around the development of a "socialist personality." But because the ideology itself is wrong, the development of the whole man cannot be accomplished. Vitaly important is the connection between spirit and body, which for the Communist ideologues has no place. Only when the connection between mind and body is made centering upon God, can athletics, as with every other aspect of our existence, begin to realize its true universal value.