

The collapse of the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe

By the end of this spread you should be able to:

- 1 explain the reasons for East European discontent with Soviet control in the 1980s
- 2 describe a Gorbachev's policies
- 3 describe the collapse of the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe

Discontent with Soviet control

By the 1980s there was widespread discontent in Eastern Europe. Although the exact circumstances of each state varied, the main sources of dissatisfaction were common to them all:

Life under Soviet control	What people wanted instead
Communist Party rule No other political parties allowed.	Political parties and free elections. Open discussion about politics.
Police state Secret police suppressed criticism of the Government using torture and terror.	Abolition of secret police forces. Freedom to criticise the Government.
State controlled economy Inefficient. Unable to produce enough food or the kind of goods people really wanted.	More freedom to own and run businesses without State interference. Farms and factories to produce sufficient food and responsive to the demand of consumers.
Low standard of living In the 1980s prices and unemployment rose and there were shortages of food and consumer goods.	Improved living standards.
Censorship Press, radio and TV were all State controlled. There was no freedom of expression.	Freedom of the press. Freedom of expression.
Religious belief This was discouraged. Members of Churches were penalized.	Freedom of religious belief.
Communist loyalty People were expected to forget their national identity and to be loyal to the Communist ideal.	The right and opportunity to express their national identity. A nation state free from outside control which would act in the interests of its citizens.

The impact of détente

The improvement in East-West relations (pages 80-81 and 86-87) led to

- 1 An interest in Capitalist methods because of a increased trade with the West
- 2 Higher awareness of the much better standards of living in Western Europe.
- 3 A reduced military threat. East Europeans began to question the value of Soviet military protection.

- 1 What were the pressures for change in Eastern Europe before Gorbachev came to power in the USSR?
- 2 a How did Gorbachev's policies make change more likely?
- b What particular actions did Gorbachev take in 1989 which affected events in individual countries?

Mikhail Gorbachev

In 1985 Gorbachev became Secretary-General of the Soviet Communist Party. At 54 he was a relatively young Soviet leader committed to carrying out reforms.

His impact on Eastern Europe

- 1 A flood of popular demands for similar changes.
- 2 A changed relationship between the USSR and Eastern Europe:
 - a Gorbachev wanted a more equal relationship between them
 - b the USSR was no longer prepared to use armed force to get its own way.
- 3 Difficulties for Communist leaders who
 - a had to adjust to Gorbachev's declarations that i Marxism had proved a failure ii the Party was not always right
 - b were likely to lose control because i of the hostility to them ii they could no longer rely on Soviet support.

How the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe collapsed

Poland

1988

Severe economic crisis. Strikes and revival of Solidarity.

1989

- 1 Jaruzelski agrees to
 - a legalize Solidarity
 - b increase press freedom
 - c hold elections while reserving a majority of seats for Communists.
- 2 Solidarity triumphs in elections. Communists do badly.
- 3 Jaruzelski appoints non-Communist Prime Minister.

East Germany

1989

- 1 Gorbachev criticises Party Secretary Honecker.
- 2 Demonstrations against Honecker. He resigns.
- 3 Free elections announced.
- 4 Demonstrators demolish the Berlin Wall.

1990

- 1 Communists defeated in elections.
- 2 East and West Germany reunified.

His inheritance

- 1 The Soviet standard of living was even lower than in most Eastern European states.
- 2 The USSR's wealth was not sufficient to bear the weight of the Government's military expenditure.
- 3 The USSR suffered severe food shortages and had to import grain from the USA and other Western countries.
- 4 Standards of health and housing were poor and declining.

His plan

- 1 Restructure the Soviet economy (*perestroika*).
- 2 Listen to public opinion and be more open about Government policy (*glasnost*).
- 3 Continue to keep real power in the hands of the Communist Party but allow some elections.
- 4 Reduce Party control of the economy.
- 5 Reduce military expenditure.
- 6 Encourage Western firms to invest in the USSR.

Hungary

1988

Kadar replaced by more 'liberal' Communist leader.

1989

- 1 Gorbachev agrees to withdraw Soviet troops.
- 2 Free travel allowed to Austria and the West.
- 3 Free elections, free press, freedom of belief allowed.

1990

Non-Communist government elected.

Czechoslovakia

1989

- 1 Demonstrators call for economic and political reform. Government uses force against them.
- 2 News of changes in Poland and East Germany encourages demonstrators to continue.
- 3 Gorbachev urges Party to respond to the people's demands.
- 4 Non-Communists join new government. Free elections organized.
- 5 Opposition leader, the author Václav Havel, elected President.

Bulgaria and Romania

1989

Hardline régimes overturned.

1990

Communists win free elections.