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# Gorbachev Moves Toward Democracy

## TERMS & NAMES

- Politburo
- Mikhail Gorbachev
- glasnost
- perestroika
- Solidarity
- Lech Walesa
- reunification

### MAIN IDEA

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev promoted democratic reforms, which inspired many Eastern Europeans.

### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

In the 1990s, most Eastern European nations overthrew communist governments. Germany reunified.

**SETTING THE STAGE** After World War II, the Soviet Union and the United States engaged in a Cold War. Each tried to increase its worldwide influence. The Soviet Union extended its power over much of Eastern Europe. By the 1960s, it appeared that communism was permanently established in the region.

## Gorbachev's Reforms

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Soviet Union's Communist leadership kept tight control over the Soviet people. Leonid Brezhnev and the **Politburo**—the ruling committee of the Communist Party—crushed all political disagreement. Censors decided what writers could publish. The Communist Party restricted such basic rights as freedom of speech and worship.

After Brezhnev's death in 1982, the aging leadership of the Soviet Union tried to hold on to power. Time was against them, however. Each of Brezhnev's two successors died after only about a year in office. Who would succeed them?

**A Younger Leader** To answer that question, the Politburo debated between two men. One was a conservative named Victor Grishin. The other was **Mikhail Gorbachev** (mih-KYL gawr-buh-CHAWF). Gorbachev's supporters praised his youth, energy, and political skills. With their backing, Gorbachev became the party's new general secretary. In choosing him, Politburo members signalled their support for mild reform in the Soviet Union. They did not realize they were unleashing a second Russian Revolution.

The Soviet people welcomed Gorbachev's election. At 54, he was the youngest Soviet leader since Stalin. Gorbachev was only a child during Stalin's ruthless purge of independent-minded party members. Unlike other Soviet leaders, Gorbachev had not needed to blindly follow Stalin's policies. He could pursue new ideas.

**Glasnost Promotes Openness** Past Soviet leaders had created a totalitarian state. It rewarded silence and discouraged individuals from acting on their own. As a result, Soviet society rarely changed. Gorbachev realized that economic and social reforms could not occur without a free flow of ideas and information. In 1985, he announced a policy known as **glasnost** (GLAHS-nuhst), or openness. He encouraged Soviet citizens to discuss ways to improve their society.

Glasnost brought remarkable changes. The government allowed churches to open. It released dissidents from prison and allowed the publication of books by previously banned authors. Reporters actively investigated social problems and openly criticized government officials.

### Background

Like Nigeria, the Soviet Union jailed dissidents. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, a dissident writer who wrote about the Soviet prison system, lived in exile from 1974 to 1994.

### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

#### A. Making

**Inferences** How might Gorbachev's young age have made him more open to reform?

## HISTORY MAKERS

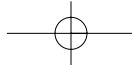


**Mikhail Gorbachev**  
1931–

Mikhail Gorbachev's background shaped the role he would play in history. Both of his grandfathers were arrested during Stalin's purges. Both were eventually freed. However, one died at an early age, perhaps because of the torture he had suffered. Gorbachev never forgot his grandfathers' stories.

After working on a state farm, Gorbachev studied law in Moscow and joined the Communist Party. As an official in a farming region, Gorbachev learned much about the Soviet system and its problems.

He advanced quickly in the party. When he became general secretary in 1985, he was the youngest Politburo member and a man who wanted to bring change. He succeeded. Although he pursued reform to save the Soviet Union, ultimately he triggered its breakup.



This political cartoon contrasts the old Soviet closed-door system with Gorbachev's new policy. The sign over the open doorway reads "Glasnost," which means openness.

**Perestroika Reforms the Economy** The new openness allowed Soviet citizens to complain publicly about economic problems. Angry consumers protested that they had to stand in long lines to buy food, soap, and other basics. Gorbachev blamed these problems on the Soviet Union's inefficient system of central planning. Under central planning, party officials told farm and factory managers how much to produce. They also told them what wages to pay, and what prices to charge. Because individuals could not increase their pay by producing more, they had little motive to improve efficiency.

In 1985, Gorbachev introduced the idea of **perestroika** (PEHR-ih-STROY-kuh), or

economic restructuring. In 1986, he made changes to revive the Soviet economy.

Local managers gained greater authority over their farms and factories, and people were allowed to open small private businesses. Gorbachev's goal was not to throw out communism, but to make the system more efficient and productive.

**Democratization Opens the Political System** Gorbachev also knew that for the economy to thrive, the Communist Party would have to loosen its grip on Soviet society and politics. In 1987, he unveiled a third new policy called democratization. This would be a gradual opening of the political system.

The plan called for the election of a new legislative body. In the past, voters had merely approved candidates who were hand-picked by the Communist Party. Now, voters could choose from a list of candidates for each office. The election produced many surprises. In several places, voters chose lesser-known candidates over powerful party bosses. Voters also elected a number of outspoken reformers.

**Foreign Policy** Soviet foreign policy also changed. Gorbachev realized that the troubled Soviet economy could no longer afford the costly arms race. He announced a "new thinking" in foreign affairs that stressed diplomacy over force. Therefore, arms control became one of Gorbachev's top priorities. In December 1987, he and President Reagan signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. This treaty banned nuclear missiles with ranges of 300 to 3,400 miles.

Gorbachev's new thinking led him to urge Eastern European leaders to open up their economic and political systems. The aging Communist rulers of Eastern Europe resisted reform. However, powerful forces for democracy were building in those countries. In the past, the threat of Soviet intervention had kept those forces in check. Now, Gorbachev was saying that the Soviet Union would not oppose reform. "Each people determines the future of its own country and chooses its own form of society," he announced. "There must be no interference from outside, no matter what the pretext."

## Reforms in Poland and Hungary

Poland and Hungary were among the first countries in Eastern Europe to embrace the spirit of change. In fact, the Polish struggle for democracy had begun before Gorbachev's rise to power. In 1978, a Polish archbishop became Pope John Paul II and lent his support to the anti-communist movement. In 1980, workers at the Gdansk shipyard went on strike, demanding government recognition of their union, **Solidarity**. When millions of Poles supported the action, the government gave in to the union's demands. Union leader **Lech Walesa** (lehk vah-WEHN-sah) became a national hero.

### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

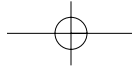
**B. Making Inferences** Why would it be inefficient for the central government to decide what should be produced all over the country?

### Background

In 1972, President Nixon and Soviet leader Brezhnev had signed the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT), which limited the number of nuclear missiles the superpowers could build.

### Background

These striking workers took a great risk. Communist governments often sent the army to attack such protesters.



**Solidarity Defeats Communists** The next year, however, the Polish government banned Solidarity again and declared martial law. The Communist Party quickly discovered that military rule could not revive Poland's failing economy. In the 1980s, industrial production declined, while foreign debt rose to more than \$40 billion. Frustrated shoppers endured long lines, shortages, and rising prices.

Public discontent deepened as the economic crisis worsened. In August 1988, defiant workers walked off their jobs. They demanded raises and the legalization of Solidarity. Faced with Poland's worst labor unrest since 1980, the military leader, General Jaruzelski (YAH-roo-ZEHL-skee), agreed to hold talks with Solidarity leaders. In April 1989, Jaruzelski legalized Solidarity and agreed to hold Poland's first free election since the Communists took power.

In elections during 1989 and 1990, Polish voters voted against Communists and overwhelmingly chose Solidarity candidates. They elected Lech Walesa president. For the first time, the people of a nation had turned a Communist regime out of office peacefully.

**Hungarian Communists Disband** Inspired by the changes in Poland, Hungarian leaders also launched a sweeping reform program. To stimulate economic growth, reformers encouraged private enterprise and allowed a small stock market to operate. A new constitution permitted a multiparty system with free parliamentary elections.

The pace of change grew faster when radical reformers took over a Communist Party congress in October 1989. The radicals deposed the party's leaders and then dissolved the party itself. Here was another first: a European Communist Party had voted itself out of existence. A year later, in national elections, the nation's voters put a non-Communist government in power.

In 1994, a socialist party—largely made up of former Communists—won a majority of seats in Hungary's parliament. The socialist party and a democratic party formed a coalition, or alliance, to rule. The following year, the government sought to improve the economy by raising taxes and cutting back on government services.

#### Vocabulary

deposed: removed from power

#### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

##### C. Analyzing

**Causes** How did the fall of communism in Hungary contribute to turmoil in East Germany?

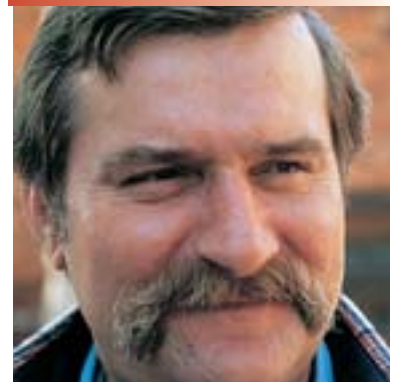
## Communism Falls in East Germany

While Poland and Hungary were moving toward reform, conservative leaders in East Germany stubbornly refused to accept change. East Germany's 77-year-old party boss Erich Honecker dismissed reforms as unnecessary. Then in 1989, Hungary allowed vacationing East German tourists to cross the border into Austria. From there they could travel to West Germany. Thousands of East Germans took this new escape route.

**Fall of the Berlin Wall** In response, the East German government closed its borders entirely. By October 1989, huge demonstrations had broken out in cities across East Germany. The protesters demanded the right to travel freely—and later added the demand for free elections. At one point, Honecker tried to regain control by ordering the police to break up a demonstration in Leipzig. The police refused. Honecker lost his authority with the party and resigned on October 18.

The new East German leader, Egon Krenz, boldly gambled that he could restore stability by allowing people to leave East Germany. On November 9, 1989, he opened the Berlin Wall. Thousands of East Germans poured into West Berlin. The long-divided city of Berlin erupted in joyous celebration. Once-feared border guards smiled as huge crowds climbed on top of the wall to celebrate. The jubilant Berliners danced and chanted, "The wall is gone! The wall is gone!" (See photograph on page 908.)

## HISTORY MAKERS



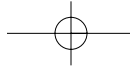
**Lech Walesa**  
1943–

When Lech Walesa was 18 months old, his father died. Before dying, he predicted that his wife would be proud of Lech someday.

At 24, Walesa began to work at the shipyard in Gdansk, Poland. Three years later, he took up the struggle for free trade unions after seeing police shoot protesters.

During the 1980 strike, Walesa and others locked themselves inside the shipyard. This attracted the attention of the world to their demands for a legally recognized union and the right to strike.

The government granted these demands but later outlawed Solidarity and jailed Walesa and other leaders. After his release, Walesa fulfilled his father's prediction. He won both the Nobel Prize and his country's presidency.



Krenz's dramatic gamble to save communism did not work. When the public discovered evidence of widespread corruption among party leaders, Krenz and other top officials were forced to resign in disgrace. By the end of 1989, the East German Communist Party had ceased to exist.

## SPOTLIGHT ON

### Fighting Neo-Nazis

The new, united Germany faced the problem of increasing violence. After communism fell, refugees flooded into Germany from the poorer countries of Eastern Europe. This immigration angered many Germans, who accused foreigners of stealing jobs by working for cheap wages.

Thousands of angry young people joined neo-Nazi groups, which began to carry out violent actions against foreigners. In May 1993, five Turkish immigrants died when their house was set on fire.

Attacks such as this revived ugly memories of Nazi violence in the 1930s. By the 1990s, however, Germany had deep democratic roots. Millions of Germans spoke out against racism and antiforeign violence and held candlelight vigils to declare, "Never again!" One such vigil is shown below.



**Germany Is Reunified** With the fall of Communism in East Germany, many Germans began to speak of **reunification**—the merging of the two Germans. However, the movement for reunification worried many people. They feared that a united Germany would once again try to dominate Europe.

West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl assured world leaders that Germans had learned from the past. They were now committed to democracy and human rights. Kohl's assurances helped persuade other European nations to accept German reunification. Forty-five years after its crushing defeat in World War II, Germany was officially reunited on October 3, 1990.

**Germany's Challenges** The newly united Germany faced serious problems. More than 40 years of Communist rule had left eastern Germany in ruins. Its railroads, highways, and telephone system had not been modernized since World War II. Many East German industries produced shoddy goods that could not compete in the global market.

Rebuilding eastern Germany's bankrupt economy was going to be a difficult, costly process. To pay these costs, Kohl raised taxes. As taxpayers tightened their belts, workers in eastern Germany faced a second problem—unemployment. Inefficient factories closed, depriving millions of workers of their jobs.

In spite of these difficulties, German voters returned the ruling coalition of political parties to power in 1994. Kohl was re-elected chancellor. But the economic troubles continued, so in 1998, voters turned Kohl out of office and elected a new chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder of the Socialist Democratic Party.

Reunification forced Germany to rethink its role in international affairs. As central Europe's largest country, Germany gained important global responsibilities. As Germany's global responsibilities grew, German leaders began to argue that the country deserved a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The Security Council is a group of 15 nations with the authority to decide UN actions. As of 2000, however, Germany had not gained membership to the body.

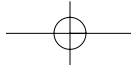
### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

**D. Clarifying** Why would Europeans fear the reunification of Germany?

## Democracy Spreads

Changes in the Soviet Union, Poland, and Hungary had helped inspire reforms in East Germany. In the same way, changes in East Germany affected other Eastern European countries, including Czechoslovakia and Romania. In those countries, however, repressive governments delayed the movement toward democracy.

**Czechoslovakia Reforms** While huge crowds were demanding democracy in East Germany, neighboring Czechoslovakia remained quiet. Vivid memories of the violent crackdown against the reforms of 1968 made the Czechs cautious. A conservative



government led by Milos Jakes resisted all change. In October 1989, the police arrested several dissidents. Among these was the Czech playwright Vaclav Havel (VAH·tshlahv HAH·vehl), a popular critic of the government.

On October 28, 1989, 10,000 people gathered in Wenceslas Square in the center of Prague. They demanded democracy and freedom. Hundreds were arrested. Three weeks later, 25,000 students inspired by the fall of the Berlin Wall gathered in Prague to demand reform. Following orders from the government, the police brutally attacked the demonstrators and injured hundreds.

The government crackdown angered the Czech people. On each of the next eight days, huge crowds gathered in Wenceslas Square. They demanded an end to Communist rule. On November 24, 500,000 protesters crowded into downtown Prague. Within hours, Milos Jakes and his entire Politburo resigned. One month later, a new parliament elected Vaclav Havel president of Czechoslovakia.

**Overthrow in Romania** By late 1989, only Romania seemed unmoved by the calls of reform. Romania's ruthless Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu (chow·SHES·koo) maintained a firm grip on power. His secret police enforced his orders brutally. Nevertheless, Romanians were aware of the reforms in other countries. They began a protest movement of their own. One student explained their anger at the government:

**A VOICE FROM THE PAST**

We were raised on a mountain of lies. There was a fantastical difference between the things they told us and the things we saw. They published incredible statistics on agricultural production, and in the shops there was nothing to eat. On paper, we had freedom of expression, but anytime anyone said anything, members of the Communist Party told us to keep our mouths shut.

STEFAN GHENCEA, Romanian student

In December, Ceausescu ordered the army to fire on demonstrators in the city of Timisoara (tee·mee·SHWAH·rah). The army killed and wounded scores of people. The massacre in Timisoara ignited a popular uprising against Ceausescu. Within days, the army joined the people. They fought to defeat the secret police and overthrow their ruler. Shocked by the sudden collapse of his power, Ceausescu and his wife attempted to flee. They were captured, however, then hastily tried and executed on Christmas Day, 1989.

Romania held general elections in 1990 and in 1992. The government also made economic reforms to introduce elements of capitalism. At the same time, the slow pace of Gorbachev's economic reforms began to cause unrest in the Soviet Union.

**SPOTLIGHT ON**

**Television's Influence**

Television played a key role in the movements for democracy. Mikhail Gorbachev used television to spread news of reform programs and bolster his image. In East Germany, people viewed Western programs and saw the contrast between affluence in the West and their own lower standard of living.

In Romania the role of television was more direct. Revolutionaries captured the state television station in Bucharest and broadcast their own views of the struggle. They used television to coordinate revolutionary actions in different parts of the country. When Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife were tried and executed, television carried the news throughout the country—along with pictures of their dead bodies. Ceausescu is shown below.



**THINK THROUGH HISTORY**  
**E. Contrasting**  
 Contrast the democratic revolutions in Czechoslovakia and Romania.

**Section 3 Assessment**

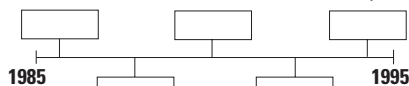
**1. TERMS & NAMES**

Identify

- Politburo
- Mikhail Gorbachev
- glasnost
- perestroika
- Solidarity
- Lech Walesa
- reunification

**2. TAKING NOTES**

Use a time line like the one below to record significant events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.



During which year did most of Eastern Europe turn toward democracy?

**3. SYNTHESIZING**

Explain how Gorbachev's reforms helped to move the Soviet Union closer toward democracy.

**THINK ABOUT**

- the democratic practices and conditions listed on the chart on page 911
- how Gorbachev's policies promoted those practices and conditions

**4. THEME ACTIVITY**

**Cultural Interaction** With a partner, create a cause-and-effect diagram to show how democratic reform spread through Eastern Europe. The diagram should show the order in which reform happened and which countries influenced others. You may want to look through this textbook for model diagrams.