Gorbachev Moves Toward Democracy

**BEFORE YOU READ**

In the last section, you read about political conflicts in Africa.

In this section, you will read about the democratic changes in Communist nations in Europe.

**AS YOU READ**

Use the web below to take notes on changes that occurred in Communist countries.

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**Gorbachev’s Reforms**  (pages 541–542)

**What changes did Gorbachev make?**

During the 1960s and 1970s, the leaders of the Soviet Union kept tight control on society. Leonid Brezhnev and the Politburo—the ruling committee of the Communist Party—crushed all political dissent. In 1985, Communist Party leaders named Mikhail Gorbachev as the leader of the Soviet Union. He was the youngest Soviet leader since Joseph Stalin. He was expected to make minor reforms. But his reforms led to a revolution.

Gorbachev felt that Soviet society could not improve without the free flow of ideas. He started a policy called **glasnost**, or openness. He opened churches. He let political prisoners out of prison. He allowed books to be published that in the past had been banned. Gorbachev also began a policy called **perestroika**, or economic restructuring. It tried to improve the Soviet economy by lifting the tight control on all managers and workers.

In 1987, Gorbachev opened up the political system by allowing the Soviet people to elect representatives to a legislature.
Finally, Gorbachev changed Soviet foreign policy. He moved to end the war in Afghanistan and the arms race against the United States. Gorbachev also urged Communist leaders in Eastern Europe to change their policies as well. But many of them resisted.

1. Name four changes Gorbachev made.

   - Ending the war in Afghanistan
   - Ending the arms race against the United States
   - Urging Communist leaders in Eastern Europe to change their policies
   - Allowing free elections in Poland

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**Reforms in Poland and Hungary**

(If you like, ask these questions.)

**How did Poland and Hungary change?**

Despite resistance from the old Communist leaders, the people of Eastern Europe wanted reform. Protest movements began to build.

In Poland, years of economic problems troubled the people. Polish workers organized a union called **Solidarity**. Solidarity went on strike to get the government to recognize the union. The government gave in to Solidarity’s demands. But later, the government banned the union and threw **Lech Walesa**, the union’s leader, in jail. This caused unrest. Finally, the government was forced to allow elections. The Polish people voted overwhelmingly against the Communists and for Solidarity.

Inspired by the Poles, leaders in Hungary started a reform movement. The reformers took over the Communist party. Then the party voted itself out of existence.

2. What happened when Poland held elections?

   - The Communists agreed to give up power.
   - General elections quickly followed and the new government reformed the economy.

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**Communism Falls in East Germany**

(If you like, ask these questions.)

**What changes occurred in Germany?**

Change soon came to East Germany as well. Its leaders resisted at first. Then thousands of people across the country demanded free elections. Soon, the Berlin Wall, which divided East and West Berlin, was torn down. By the end of 1989, the Communist party was out of power.

The next year **reunification** occurred. The two parts of Germany, East and West, were one nation again. But the new nation had many problems. The biggest problem was the weak economy in the east. And, as the largest nation in central Europe, Germany needed to face its new role in world affairs.

3. What happened after the Berlin Wall fell?

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**Democracy Spreads**

(If you like, ask these questions.)

**What happened in Czechoslovakia and Romania?**

In Czechoslovakia, similar calls for reform took place. When the government cracked down on protesters, thousands of Czechs poured into the streets. One day 500,000 people gathered to protest in the nation’s capital. The Communists agreed to give up power.

In Romania, **Nicolae Ceausescu**, the Communist dictator, ordered the army to shoot at protesters. This caused larger protests. The army then joined the people and fought against the secret police loyal to Ceausescu. He was captured and executed in 1989. General elections quickly followed and the new government reformed the economy.

4. How did the governments of Czechoslovakia and Romania change?
Section 3: Gorbachev Moves Toward Democracy (pages 541-545)

1. Possible responses: glasnost, perestroika, allowing people to elect representatives to a legislature, ending the arms race and the war in Afghanistan.

2. The Polish people voted overwhelmingly against the Communists and for Solidarity.

3. The Communists lost power in East Germany, and the following year German reunification took place.

4. Communism ended in both Romania and Czechoslovakia. In Czechoslovakia this occurred after large protests. In Romania it occurred after bloody fighting.