

The Revolutions of 1989

- I. Overview
 - A. By the end of 1989, Communist Party governments had fallen throughout Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe
 - B. In virtually every country (except for Romania), the movement toward democracy and representative government followed the same pattern:
 - 1. because of public pressure (strikes, demonstrations, etc.), hard-line Communist leaders began to resign
 - 2. younger Communists replaced them, but the changes they offered were inadequate
 - 3. reform came with the collapse of the Communist Parties and the implementation of new leadership
 - C. A major reason that this relatively peaceful transition from Communism to democracy occurred was that the Soviet Union refused to respond militarily as it had in 1956 (Hungary) and 1968 (Czechoslovakia)
 - 1. in October 1989, Gorbachev formally renounced the Brezhnev Doctrine
 - 2. while part of the reason for Gorbachev's refusal to help the old-line Communist governments in Eastern Europe was that he was making similar reforms, another was that the Soviet Union simply lacked the resources to continue to control what was formally the Soviet Bloc
- II. Comparisons to the Revolutions of 1848
 - A. Location
 - 1. 1848: Habsburg Empire, Prussia, and the German Confederation (though revolutions also occurred in France and Italy)
 - 2. 1989: Eastern Europe (what was formally territories of the Habsburg Empire, Prussia, and Russia)
 - B. Nationalism and Liberalism
 - 1. 1848: Both Nationalism and Liberalism played an important role
 - 2. 1989: Primarily driven by Liberalism (the desire for representative and constitutional government)
 - C. Groups behind the Revolutions
 - 1. 1848:
 - a. Middle Class wanted political reform (more rights, power, representation, and privileges)
 - b. Lower Class wanted social reform (better conditions, higher wages, etc.)
 - c. Thus, you had two different groups pushing for two different things
 - 2. 1989:
 - a. unified movement (i.e., all social classes) against the totalitarian Communist regimes of Eastern Europe
 - b. reforms desired (e.g., democracy, individual rights and freedoms, etc.) applied to all
 - D. Groups in Power
 - 1. 1848: Conservative Governments (mostly absolute monarchies) supported by the Congress of Vienna
 - 2. 1989: Communist, totalitarian Regimes supported by the Soviet Union
 - E. Methods
 - 1. 1848: violent revolution and popular uprisings
 - 2. 1989: non-violent, relatively peaceful reform (except for Romania)
 - F. Results
 - 1. 1848: because the middle class did not address the needs of the lower class, the conservative governments were able to regain control
 - 2. 1989: Because the Soviet Union refused to support the Communist regimes, the revolutions were successful

III. Specific Revolutions

A. Poland

1. during the 1980s, Poland's economy continued to deteriorate
2. as leaders of Solidarity were released from prison, they began again to work for free trade unions and democratic government
3. in 1988, new strikes occurred throughout the nation and the government could not regain control
4. Solidarity was legalized by the government shortly thereafter
 - a. Lech Walesa acted as mediator between the government and Solidarity
 - b. Jaruzelski repealed martial law and promised free elections
5. in 1989, free elections to Parliament were held and Solidarity candidates captured a large majority
6. on August 24, 1989, Jaruzelski named Tadeusz Mazowiecki the first noncommunist prime minister of Poland since 1945

B. Hungary

1. during the early months of 1989, the Hungarian Parliament passed legislation to permit independent political parties
2. also opened the Hungarian border with Austria and permitted free travel between the two nations (first breach of the "Iron Curtain")
3. Premier Janos Kadar was voted from office by the Parliament
4. By 1990, a coalition of democratic parties controlled the Parliament and governed the country

C. East Germany

1. popular demonstrations erupted across Germany demanding democracy and an end to Communist Party rule
2. the Communist leader of the East German government resigned, making way for a younger generation of Communist Party leaders
3. in November 1989, the government of East Germany ordered the opening of the Berlin Wall
4. The East German Communist Party changed its name and claimed that henceforth it would be a social democratic party
5. Germany was reunited in 1991

D. Czechoslovakia

1. in November 1989, under popular pressure from street demonstrations, the Communist Party began to retreat from office
2. Vaclav Havel, leader of *Civic Forum*, negotiated a series of changes to the government
 - a. political dominance of the Communists ended
 - b. non-Communists were allowed in the government
 - c. traditional Marxist education was eliminated
 - d. travel restrictions were removed
 - e. there was a relaxation of censorship
3. in December 1989, Gustav Husak (leader since 1968) resigned and Havel was elected president

E. Romania

1. only violent revolution
2. Nicolae Ceausescu had governed without opposition for almost a quarter of a century
 - a. he was a brutal, Stalinesque ruler
 - b. he ignored Gorbachev's reforms
3. in December 1989, riots broke out in Bucharest
4. shortly thereafter, fighting occurred between the army (which supported the revolution) and the security forces of Ceausescu
5. Ceausescu was captured and executed on December 25, 1989