

## STUDY PACK 28

### THE COLLAPSE OF EUROPEAN COMMUNISM

The following notice appeared in a Hungarian paper, “With joyful heart we announce that Communism passed away on March 25, 1990 in its forty-second year. Our hated deceased has been put to eternal rest this same day at midnight. The happy family: the Magyar people.”

“Actually the world is becoming a museum of socialist failures.”

~~ John Dos Passos ~~

#### I. BLIND FAITH IN BIG GOVERNMENT

By the 1980’s, American politicians, academics and media figures were describing the results of communism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in glowing terms.

“The Soviet economy has made great national progress in recent years.”

—  
JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH  
Professor of Economics  
Harvard University

▪  
*New Yorker Magazine, 1984*

“It is a vulgar mistake to think that most people in Eastern Europe are miserable.”

—  
PAUL SAMUELSON  
Nobel Laureate  
Professor of Economics  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

▪  
*Economics, 1981*

“Can economic command significantly compress and accelerate the growth process? The remarkable performance of the Soviet Union suggests that it can. In 1920 Russia was but a minor figure in the economic councils of the world. Today it is a country whose economic achievements bear comparison with those of the United States.”

—  
LESTER THUROW  
Professor of Economics  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

▪  
*The Economic Problem, 1989*

“...no one can deny that it has made tremendous economic progress.”

—  
LESTER THUROW  
Professor of Economics  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

▪  
*The Economic Problem, 1989*

“The Soviet Union is not now nor will it be during the next decade in the throes of a true systemic crisis, for it boasts enormous unused reserves of political and social stability that suffice to endure the deepest difficulties.”

—  
SEWERYN BIALER  
Professor of Political Science  
Columbia University

▪  
*Foreign Affairs Magazine, 1982/83*

“On the economic front, for the first time in its history the Soviet leadership was able to pursue successfully a policy of guns and butter as well as growth...The Soviet citizen – worker, peasant, and professional – has become accustomed in the Brezhnev period to an uninterrupted upward trend in his well-being...”

—  
SEWERYN BIALER  
Professor of Political Science  
Columbia University

▪  
*Foreign Affairs Magazine, 1982/83*

In reality, communism in Europe was about to be overthrown by the people of Europe. Communism was collapsing under the weight of \_\_\_\_\_.

## II. REAGAN AND THATCHER

Once European Communism began to collapse, it collapsed more quickly than anyone dreamed possible. \_\_\_\_\_, President of the U.S., and \_\_\_\_\_, Prime Minister of Great Britain, were determined to bring about the collapse of Communism. Both believed that the collapse of Communism was inevitable. Both believed that it was possible for free nations to hasten the collapse of Communism. These quotes from Ronald Reagan demonstrate their attitude:

“The years ahead will be great ones for our country, for the cause of freedom and for the spread of civilization. The west will not contain communism, it will transcend communism. We will not bother to denounce it; we’ll dismiss it as a sad, bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written.”

▪  
May 1981  
Commencement address at Notre Dame University

“In an ironic sense, Karl Marx was right. We are witnessing today a great revolutionary crisis – a crisis where the demands of the economic order are colliding directly with those of the political order. But the crisis is happening not in the free, non-Marxist west, but in the home of Marxism-Leninism, the Soviet Union ... What we see here is a political structure that no longer corresponds to its economic base, a society where productive forces are hampered by political ones.”

▪  
June 1982  
Address to the British Parliament

“It is the Soviet Union that runs against the tide of history ... It is the march of freedom and democracy which will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash heap of history as it has left other tyrannies which stifle the freedom and muzzle the self-expression of the people”

“Let us beware that while they (The Soviet leaders) preach the supremacy of the state, declare its omnipotence over individual man, and predict its eventual domination over all the peoples of the earth, they are the focus of evil in the modern world ... I urge you to beware the temptation ... to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of any evil empire, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong, good and evil.”

After Reagan and Thatcher began to lead the free world’s response to Communism, the Communists never secured control of another nation. England and the U.S. led the free world in challenging Communism morally and in aiding anti-Communist freedom fighters around the world. They understood the economic weakness of Communism. While American and English liberals were praising the strength and progress of the Soviet Union, Reagan and Thatcher were challenging it to an arms race. The Soviets tried to match the U.S. and English military spending, but a socialist economy could not produce enough strength and the attempt broke the power of the Soviet Union.

### III. THE UNDERGROUND

\_\_\_\_\_ began to grow in the Communist countries. These movements had to operate in secret but they began to make more and more information available throughout Europe. Underground newsletters flourished. Copies of \_\_\_\_\_ were spread throughout nations where they were banned. Great books like *The Federalist Papers*, *Democracy in America* (Alexis de Tocqueville), and commentaries on English law and freedom were spread throughout Eastern Europe. The speeches of Reagan and Thatcher were printed in defiance of the Communist governments. Radio Free Europe broadcast all over Europe. Staggering economics encouraged public discontent.

Many of the past WWII leaders who had brought Communism to these countries had died. Pope John Paul II, a Polish native who had resisted Communist rule in Poland before ascending to the papacy, began visits to Poland and other Eastern European countries. The governments did not want him but he was so popular, they were afraid to stop him. He drew huge crowds and his visits revitalized Roman Catholic opposition to Communism.

### IV. MIKHAIL GORBACHEV

Mikhail Gorbachev became the Premier of the Soviet Union. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was hopelessly bogged down as the brave people of Afghanistan fought valiantly against the invading Russian army (using U.S. weapons). The Soviet attempts to match the Reagan “\_\_\_\_\_” missile defense program and other western arms initiatives were shattering the Soviet economy. Gorbachev was a committed Communist, but he was convinced that western support was necessary to maintain Communism.

He initiated small reforms to try to convince western nations that Communism had changed. He called his initiatives and policies “\_\_\_\_\_.”

The reforms were small; however, they did make the people in Communist countries even hungrier for more freedom. American liberals treated Gorbachev like a great hero, but the Russian people considered him one of the last barriers to the fall of Communism.

Throughout Eastern Europe, desperate Communist governments began to allow \_\_\_\_\_ order to strengthen their devastated economies. By 1988, one-eighth of the farm land was under private ownership. This land produced three-eighths of the crops in Eastern Europe.

## V. POLAND

The people of Poland had rebelled against the Communists in 1980. Led by the workers union Solidarity, the people of Poland had clashed with the Communist run army and police force. The Communist dictator, General Jaruzelski, placed the country under martial law. In 1989, the country was still under martial law but opposition from the people was so great that he consented to free elections. He ran as the Communist party candidate. A pro-freedom party ran on the slogan \_\_\_\_\_. They easily won.

The day after the election, bookstores began to offer sales on previously banned books. The Communist Party apparatus and controls were quickly dismantled. There were threats of a Soviet Union invasion, but the Pope promised to personally withstand the Russian tanks at the border. The U.S. led by George Bush Sr., and Great Britain led by Margaret Thatcher, offered support to the freely elected Polish government. The Soviet troops already in Poland were asked to leave. Gorbachev resisted pressures from Communist leadership to invade.

## VI. FREEDOM THROUGHOUT EASTERN EUROPE

Throughout Eastern Europe, other nations watched carefully the events in Poland. People began to clamor for freedom. During WWII, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania had been incorporated by force into the Soviet Union. In 1988, they all issued Declarations of Sovereignty. Communist forces resisted and there were riots, protests, and arrests; but the people withstood the Communist forces and again Gorbachev backed down from a threatened invasion. By 1989, these nations were holding elections and recognizing rival governments to the Soviet installed regimes. In \_\_\_\_\_, the Soviet Union startled the world by \_\_\_\_\_.

In 1989, rioters overthrew the Communist government of Czechoslovakia. Young girls walked up to riot police and gave them flowers. Vehicles could not move through the streets as millions of people demanded freedom. The Soviet-backed government disintegrated. The free nation of Czechoslovakia dissolved the artificial union created after WWI and became two separate nations.

George Bush visited Hungary. He was greeted by huge crowds who chanted approval of Bush, Reagan, and Thatcher, and condemned their government leaders. Freedom demonstrations became open and commonplace. The Hungarian Communist government agreed to free elections and even bragged about how easily they could win these elections. Anti-Communist candidates won by a landslide.

Romania had been ruled by Communist dictators Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu ever since WWII. They forbade the news media to report on events in the rest of Eastern Europe and forbade the people to discuss them. Nevertheless, massive freedom demonstrations took place. The police and soldiers were ordered to shoot the demonstrators. Thousands were killed but the numbers of demonstrators increased. Ceausescu ordered the executions of many pro-freedom leaders but new

leaders arose to take their place. Members of the police and army began to join the rioters. On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Ceausescu fled the capital. On December 25<sup>th</sup>, they were captured and shot by a firing squad. Elena's last words were "you have not the right to tie the hands of your mother. I have raised you like a mother."

## **VII. CHINA AND VIETNAM**

Chinese students, inspired by events in Europe, began to demand freedom. They \_\_\_\_\_ to demonstrate for freedom. Soon there were hundreds of thousands of demonstrators. Local military units who were ordered to attack the demonstrators refused.

The free world watched China in the hope that freedom was about to break out there. But the Communist Chinese government moved in new troops and crushed the demonstrations by force, killing thousands. Hoping to prevent future demonstrations, the Chinese government began to grant \_\_\_\_\_. These freedoms created tremendous growth in the Chinese economy.

The government of Vietnam moved to prevent demonstrations by granting new financial opportunities and limited freedom of expression.

## **IV. LATIN AMERICA**

The Communist government of Granada had been overthrown by a U.S. invasion ordered by President Reagan. In Nicaragua, the opposition \_\_\_\_\_ forced the Communist government into free elections. American liberals talked about how much the people loved the Communist government and predicted a landslide Communist victory. The anti-Communist candidates won by a landslide.

## **X. IN EUROPE**

The republics of Georgia and the Ukraine announced that they were withdrawing from the Soviet Union. After brief fighting, the Russia-installed governments were overthrown. The Russian army was withdrawn from Afghanistan. Communist governments in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria collapsed. All over Eastern Europe, statues to Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher were erected.

In East Germany, pro-freedom demonstrations took place. People began to defy the restrictions of the Berlin Wall and the army defied orders to shoot them. On \_\_\_\_\_, a huge crowd began to tear down the Berlin Wall and East Berlin was incorporated into West Berlin. In a matter of days, the East German government collapsed and Germany was reunited.

## **XI. THE SOVIET UNION**

Under pressure from the people, Gorbachev was forced to hold Parliamentary elections. Non-Communists quickly took control of Parliament. The Communists seized control of the Kremlin and tried to oust the new Parliament. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets and surrounded the Communist leaders. The army was ordered to fire on the demonstrators but refused; the Communist government was overthrown. \_\_\_\_\_ became the unofficial leader of Russia and would later win the first two free elections for the position of President.

The Communist Party's control of the nation began to be dismantled. However, many political parties formed in Russia. There was tremendous confusion about how to move from a socialist economy to a free economy.

In December of 1991, the Soviet Union was officially dissolved and the former member republics were set free. Throughout the ex-Communist world, nations struggled with the transition to freedom with varying results.

In 1991, Margaret Thatcher would declare that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.