CHAPTER 38

Soviet Union & Eastern Europe Since 1945

TIME LINE

1947	The Soviet Union establishes the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform)
1948	A Communist dictatorship is imposed on Czechoslovakia
	Yugoslavia's Marshal Tito defects from the Soviet bloc
1953	Joseph Stalin dies; Georgi Malenkov becomes Soviet premier
	The Soviets suppress the East German revolt
1955	Marshal Nikolai Bulganin replaces Malenkov as premier
1956	Nikita Khrushchev denounces Stalin in a speech to the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party
	Wladyslaw Gomulka becomes head of the Polish Communist Party
	The Soviets suppress the Hungarian revolution
1957	The Soviets launch Sputnik I
1958	Nikita Khrushchev becomes Soviet premier, succeeding Bulganin
	Boris Pasternak wins the Nobel Prize for literature
1960	Albania breaks with the Soviet Union
1963	Rumania begins to pursue a more independent course
1964	Leonid I. Brezhnev succeeds Khrushchev as general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party; Alexei N. Kosygin becomes premier
1968	The Soviets invade Czechoslovakia, ending Alexander Dubcek's reform efforts
1980	Solidarity, an independent trade union, is established in Poland
1981	General Wojciech Jaruzelski becomes head of the Polish Communist Party
1985	Mikhail Gorbachev becomes general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party
1989	The Polish government grants legal recognition to Solidarity

The Soviet Union emerged from World War II as one of the two superpowers, along with the United States. Although the Soviets had suffered immense losses of both lives and property, Soviet heavy industry continued to expand, and the country's armed might increased. The totalitarian political system remained intact, although after Stalin's death in 1953 his heirs made some efforts to reduce the repression. After taking office as general secretary of the Communist Party in 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev initiated afar-reaching reform program.

The Soviets took control of most of Eastern Europe at war's end. Despite the imposition of Communist governments in the so-called satellite states, however, nationalism remained a powerful force, and a number of challenges to Soviet domination emerged.

The Soviet Union

Stalin's Last Years

As Joseph Stalin's dictatorship moved into its final years, the Soviet Union remained a brutal police state. The expression of dissent was impossible, and intellectuals and artists were forced into a leaden conformity. Stalin's cult of personality grew, and his authority remained unchallenged.

Economic Policy

According to one estimate, World War II had cost the Soviet Union a third of its national wealth. The Soviets launched a new series of Five Year Plans designed to reconstruct the nation's economy and to promote its further expansion. Emphasis continued to be placed on the development of heavy industry, while the production of consumer goods and the construction of housing were neglected. Agricultural production lagged, and food shortages were a common feature of Soviet life. The Soviets also devoted much of their resources to the development of their military strength.

Death of Stalin

During late 1952 and early 1953, it appeared that Stalin might be on the verge of launching another great purge, repeating the horrors of the 1930s. The Soviet press reported charges that a group of physicians had conspired to kill a number of Soviet leaders. As the propaganda campaign intensified, Stalin died suddenly on March 6, 1953.

The Soviet Union Under Khrushchev

Although Georgi Malenkov (1902-1988) succeeded Stalin as premier, a collective leadership exercised power. The new leaders quickly brought a hah to the "Doctors' Plot" campaign and ordered the release of the accused. Lavrenti Beria (1899-1953), the ambitious head of the secret police, was dismissed and executed. Gradually, Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971), the party secretary, emerged as the most influential of the country's new leaders. In 1955, he succeeded in replacing Malenkov with Marshal Nikolai Bulganin (1895-1975). Khrushchev then moved to solidify his own power, and by 1958 he was strong enough to take the premiership for himself. Nevertheless,

Khrushchev was never able to wield the kind of unchallenged power that Stalin had.

Economic Policy

While the Soviet Union remained an authoritarian state, Khrushchev initiated a number of reforms. In the sphere of economic policy, although he did not abandon the traditional emphasis on heavy industry, Khrushchev encouraged the production of consumer goods and the construction of housing. He boasted that by 1970 Soviet per capita production would catch up with that of the United States. In fact, the expansion of the Soviet economy began to lag during the 1960s, and Khrushchev's boast was soon forgotten.

Agriculture

In an effort to increase agricultural production, Khrushchev consolidated collective farms into larger units and initiated the virgin lands program, beginning the cultivation of semiarid land, especially in Western Siberia and Central Asia. Although the program scored some early successes, a series of droughts soon turned much of the area into a dust bowl.

Space Achievements

The Soviets continued to invest much of their resources in the anus race and devoted increasing appropriations to space research. In the autumn of 1957, the Soviets launched Sputnik I, the first artificial earth satellite. In 1959, they succeeded in sending a rocket to the moon, and in April 1961, Yuri Gagarin (1934-1968) made the first manned orbital flight. The Soviets' space exploits greatly increased the international prestige of the Soviet Union, especially in the Third World.

"The Thaw"

In February 1956, Khrushchev delivered a powerful denunciation of Stalin's policy mistakes, crimes, and cult of personality in an address to the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party.

Khrushchev rehabilitated many of Stalin's victims, some posthumously, and millions of prisoners were released from the Soviet Union's labor camps. Intellectuals and artists were permitted greater freedom of expression in what came to be called The Thaw. Works appeared in print that could not conceivably have been published in Stalin's time. One of the most notable was Vladimir Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone* (1957), an outspoken criticism of the Soviet bureaucracy.

Pasternak

VIAULT

The case of Boris Pasternak's great novel *Doctor Zhivago* soon revealed the limits of The Thaw. In *Doctor Zhivago*, Pasternak (18901960) celebrated the human spirit and did not attempt to conform to the ideological standards dictated by the Soviet Writers' Union. Initially, the Soviet censors approved the publication of *Doctor Zhivago*, and a copy of the manuscript was sent to an Italian publisher. The censors then reversed themselves, declaring the novel unacceptable because of its rejection of the principles of the revolution. The Italian publisher refused to return the manuscript, however, and published an Italian translation in 1957. Translations in other Western languages quickly followed. Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1958. The Soviet authorities told Pasternak that if he left the country to accept the award, he would not be allowed to return. Pasternak spent the remaining years of his life in seclusion.

Foreign Policy

In foreign affairs, Khrushchev first sought a reduction of tension with the West and then pursued a more adventuristic policy, challenging the Western powers at Berlin and the United States in the Cuban missile crisis (see Chapter 36). In addition, Soviet relations with Communist China deteriorated.

Fall of Khrushchev

Opposition to Khrushchev gradually increased within the Soviet leadership, which criticized him for his failures in agriculture and foreign policy and also for his personal "rudeness." He was removed from his positions in October 1964. Alexei N. Kosygin (1904-1980) replaced him as premier, while Leonid I. Brezhnev (1906-1982) became general secretary of the Communist Party. Brezhnev gradually became the dominant figure in the Soviet regime, and in 1977 he assumed the additional title of president.

The Soviet Union from Brezhnev to Gorbachev

In economic affairs, the Brezhnev years were a period of increasing stagnation. Although more consumer goods and housing became available, the quality was of ten shoddy and shortages persisted. Agriculture remained particularly troubled, and the Soviets depended on grain imports from the United States and other Western countries.

Expulsion of Solzhenitsyn

For Soviet intellectuals and artists, the Brezhnev era was a time of renewed repression. The most famous case involved the writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn (b. 1918). Under Stalin, Solzhenitsyn had been imprisoned in a labor camp and his brief novel based on that experience, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. had been published in the Soviet Union in 1962. Solzhenitsyn ran into increasing trouble with the authorities, however, and permission to publish other works was denied.

Solzhenitsyn smuggled manuscripts to the West, where they were published, and he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1970. Like Pasternak, Solzhenitsyn was not permitted to leave the Soviet Union to accept the award. In 1974, The Gulag Archipelago, a long work on Soviet police terror and the labor camps, was published in the West. Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Soviet Union the following year.

Exile of Sakharov

Andrei Sakharov (1921-1989), a physicist and a key figure in the Soviet Union's development of the hydrogen bomb, also joined the ranks of the dissidents, calling for greater freedom of expression and a liberalization of the political system. In 1975, Sakharov was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, but the authorities would not allow him to leave the country to accept it. Sakharov's contacts with Western journalists annoyed the regime, and he was sent into internal exile in the city of Gorky, which was off-limits to Westerners.

Jewish Emigration

The question of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union became a serious issue during the Brezhnev years. In the 1970s, the Soviet regime permitted an increasing number of Jews to leave, although many continued to be denied exit visas. When American-Soviet relations deteriorated following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Jewish emigration declined markedly.

Andropov and Chernenko

Following Brezhnev's death in November 1982, he was followed in quick succession by two men of his generation. Yuri Andropov (1914-1984) became seriously ill soon after taking over as general secretary and died in February 1984. Konstantin Chernenko (19111985) was already in declining health when chosen to replace Andropov and died in March 1985.

Mikhail Gorbachev (b. 1931)

The Soviet Politburo now turned to a younger generation of leaders, selecting Mikhail Gorbachev as general secretary. Gorbachev quickly introduced two new terms to the political vocabulary: glasnost and perestroika.

Glasnost

The policy of *glasnost* ("openness") sought to reduce the intellectual and cultural repression that had long characterized the Soviet system and had contributed to its stagnation. Gorbachev went far beyond Khrushchev's "Thaw" of the late 1950s. The reporting of news became more honest and less propagandistic, and restrictions on dissenters were reduced. Glasnost led, for example, to the decision to publish Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* and to permit Sakharov to return to Moscow.

Perestroika

Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika* ("restructuring") had implications for both politics and the economy. Gorbachev proposed reducing the direct involvement of the Communist Party leadership in the day-to-day governance of the country and increasing the authority of agencies of local government. In the economic realm, he sought to promote not only greater productivity in both industry and agriculture, but also to improve the quality of manufactured goods. *Perestroika* called for a decentralization of economic planning and controls, increased incentives, and greater private initiative than had been permitted in the past.

Political Changes

When his policies encountered opposition from a number of old-line bureaucrats and party officials, Gorbachev succeeded, in the autumn of 1988, in reshaping the Communist Party's leadership. He took the title of president for himself, removed several of his opponents from their positions, and demoted others. In 1989, for the first time in history, contested elections for the Soviet parliament were held, and a number of prominent Communists were defeated. While Gorbachev appeared serious in his determination to promote reform, he was equally determined to maintain the Communist Party's hold on power.

In foreign policy, Gorbachev sought improved relations with the Western powers (see Chapter 36) and pursued a reconciliation with China, visiting Beijing, the Chinese capital, in May 1989.

Eastern Europe

The Sovietization of Eastern Europe

The end of World War II brought with it a considerable extension of Soviet power in Eastern Europe. The Soviets reannexed the territory they had acquired as a result of Stalin's 1939 pact with Hitler (see Chapter 34): eastern Poland, the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), and the Rumanian province of Bessarabia, as well as some Finnish territory. In addition, the Soviets imposed Communist-dominated governmel1ls on Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Hungary. In Yugoslavia and Albania, local Communists took power, while Communists played the leading role in the coalition governing Czechoslovakia. The Soviets also controlled their occupation zone in eastern Germany and until 1955, an occupation zone in Austria.

In the late 1940s, as the United States initiated the Truman Doctrine program of aid to Greece and Turkey and the Marshall Plan (see Chapter 36), the Soviets moved to tighten their hold on Eastern Europe. In September 1947, they organized the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) to serve as an instrument of control over the Eastern European Communist parties. The Soviets also removed from power Eastern European Communist leaders whom they suspected of being less than completely willing to accept Moscow's dictates. In February 1948, they imposed a Communist dictatorship on Czechoslovakia. Later the same year, the Soviets sponsored the creation of the Council for Economic Mutual Assistance (COMECON), a sort of Marshall Plan for the Soviet bloc. Instead of assisting the recovery of the Eastern European economies, however, the Soviets exploited them.

Tito's Defection

In March 1948, Marshal Tito (1891-1980), Yugoslavia's Communist dictator, defected from the Soviet camp. While Tito was a Communist, he was also a nationalist. His role in the Yugoslav guerrilla war against the Germans had brought him to power at war's end. Unlike other Eastern European Communist leaders, he did not owe his power to the Red Army. Refusing to obey orders from Moscow, Tito moved to improve Yugoslavia's relations with the Western powers.

Tito's revolt revealed the continuing strength of nationalism among the Eastern Europeans and suggested that the force of nationalism could create problems for the Soviets elsewhere among their satellites.

The East German Revolt

In 1949, following the creation of the German Federal Republic in the Western occupation zones, the Soviets established the Communist-dominated German Democratic Republic in their zone.

Mounting unrest in East Germany erupted in June 1953 when construction workers in East Berlin went on strike to protest the government's raising of work norms. The strike quickly spread to other East German cities, and the country appeared on the verge of open revolt against its Communist rulers. However, Soviet forces stationed in East Germany soon restored order.

Poland and Hungary

Following Stalin's death in 1953, the new Soviet leadership tried to improve relations with Yugoslavia's Marshal Tito, acknowledging his view that there were various paths to socialism and that it was not necessary for all Communist stales to imitate the Soviet pattern. This, as well as Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign, had a powerful effect on the Eastern European Communist satellites.

In the autumn of 1956, long-smoldering resentments erupted in Poland and Hungary.

Poland's Deviation

The Polish Communist leaders removed their Stalinist party chief and replaced him with Wladyslaw Gomulka (1905-1982), a national Communist whom the Soviets had pushed aside in the late 1940s. Gomulka set out to develop a Polish path to socialism and to improve relations with the Roman Catholic Church, which continued lo hold the allegiance of the vast majority of Poland's population.

For a time, it remained uncertain how the Soviets would respond to the events in Poland, but Gomulka succeeded in convincing them that Poland would remain a Communist state and would maintain its alliance with the USSR. Thus reassured, the Soviets agreed to let Poland pursue its new course. The Poles breathed a sigh of relief and spoke of "spring in October."

Hungary's Attempted Revolution

In Hungary, the outcome was less happy. Imre Nagy (1896-1958), a national Communist like Gomulka, became party leader in October 1956. Hungarian nationalism then exploded in a great popular revolution, which pushed Nagy further than he had originally intended to go. He announced that Hungary would reestablish a multiparty system. Almost inevitably, this would have ended the Communists' control of the government. In addition, Nagy indicated that Hungary would end its alliance with the Soviet Union and pursue a neutralist foreign policy.

In early November, the Red Army moved into Hungary. Nagy was removed and later executed. Janos Kadar (1912-1989) was installed as

Hungary's new Communist dictator. During the revolt, some 200,000 Hungarians fled across the Austrian border, seeking refuge in the West.

While Kadar acted ruthlessly in his suppression of dissent, over the course of the next generation he gradually introduced reforms. While political power remained the monopoly of the Communists, Kadar permitted greater freedom of cultural expression and also allowed a degree of private economic enterprise that was unknown elsewhere in the Soviet bloc.

In May 1988, Kadar fell from power. Karoly Grosz (b. 1930), his successor, moved to democratize Hungary's political system and introduced reforms designed to revitalize the country's lagging economy.

Albania and Rumania

Like Tito in Yugoslavia, Enver Hozha (1908-1985), Albania's Communist leader, had achieved power on his own and thus owed little to the Soviets. Hozha's continued rigid adherence to Stalinist policies led to a break with Moscow in 1960. The Albanians then moved into the Chinese camp.

In 1963, Rumania refused to follow Soviet directives for its economic development and began to pursue a more independent course. In Moscow's view, Rumania should concentrate on agriculture and oil production; the Rumanians wanted to industrialize. While Rumania remained a rigid Communist dictatorship, it began to develop closer ties with the West.

The Crisis in Czechoslovakia

The most serious challenge to the Soviets during the 1960s came from Czechoslovakia. In January 1968, Alexander Dubcek (b. 1921), a national Communist, became head of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and initiated a reform program. Dubcek abolished censorship, allowing greater intellectual and cultural freedom and a more open discussion of political issues. He even considered permitting non-Communist political groups to exist. In foreign policy, Dubcek moved to improve relations with the West.

Fearing the spread of demands for reform to other Eastern European countries, Moscow began to pressure the Czechoslovak leaders to restrict the scope of reform. When the Czechoslovaks refused to do so, Soviet, East German, Polish, Hungarian, and Bulgarian troops invaded Czechoslovakia on August 21, 1968. Dubcek was forced out of office. His successor, Gustav Husak (b. 1913), restored tight Communist Party control over the country. Husak remained in power until December 1987, when Milos Jakes (b. 1922) succeeded him.

Renewed Crisis in Poland

During the 1960s, there were signs of renewed discontent in Poland, particularly over the failures of the government's economic policies, which resulted in serious food shortages and price increases. Protests led to Gomulka's resignation in 1970 and his replacement by Edward Gierek (b. 1913).

Despite the change in leadership, economic problems persisted and grew more serious, giving rise to increased discontent. In addition, there were growing demands for increased intellectual and cultural freedom.

In August 1980, shipyard workers in the Baltic port of Gdansk went on strike. As fear of violence increased, the government yielded to most of the strikers' demands and recognized their independent union, Solidarity, led by Lech Walesa (b. 1943). Gierek lost his post as head of the Communist Party and was succeeded by Stanislaw Kania (b. 1927).

The pressure for changes in Poland continued. In early 1981, Solidarity demanded a five-day workweek, while rebellious farmers organized a union of their own, Rural Solidarity. Poland's economic problems persisted, and food shortages led to rationing. As tension mounted, the Polish Communist Party replaced Kania with General Wojciech Jaruzelski (b. 1923). In December 1981, Jaruzelski declared martial law, outlawed Solidarity, and ordered the arrest of a number of its leaders, including Walesa.

Although Jaruzelski restored the control of the Communist Party, discontent persisted. In April 1989, the government extended legal recognition to Solidarity and promised that opposition groups would be represented in the new parliament. After Solidarity scored major gains in Communist Poland's first free elections later in the spring, the country's Communist leaders moved to share power with the union. Serious economic problems, including food shortages, shortages of consumer goods and housing, and rising prices, persisted, resulting in a steady decline in the standard of living of the Polish people.

Poland's problems were repeated throughout the Communist bloc, and as the twentieth century moved into its final years, the pressures for change were intensifying.

As the decade of the 1980s drew to a close, the Soviet Union appeared to be entering an entirely new period in its history. Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika. if they succeeded, would end the legacy of Stalinism: the demand for total intellectual and cultural conformity, the complete subordination of the Soviet government to the hierarchy of the Communist Party. and the emphasis on the

development of heavy industry with a consequent neglect of consumer goods production and housing construction.

Communist Eastern Europe also seemed destined for change. Reform in the Soviet Union, combined with the ever-present force of nationalism, would almost inevitably lead both to changes in the nature of the Communist system in the Eastern European states and to the development of new relationships between them and the Soviet Union.