Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

Soviet control of Eastern Europe, 1948–c1989

Contents

1. Start here: the Soviet grip on Eastern Europe
2. Hungary, 1956
3. Czechoslovakia, 1968
4. The Berlin Wall, 1961
5. Solidarity and the collapse of Soviet control
6. Key terms
7. Quick questions
8. What to do next

Start here: the Soviet grip on Eastern Europe

- After 1945, Stalin made sure communist governments ran Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and East Germany. They were **satellite states**: officially independent, but controlled from Moscow.
- Control came through the secret police, one-party rule, Soviet troops, Comecon (1949, linking their economies to the USSR) and the **Warsaw Pact** (1955), a military alliance led by the USSR.
- Resentment grew because of shortages, low living standards, lack of freedom and rule by a foreign power.

Hungary, 1956

- Stalin died in 1953. In February 1956 the new leader, Khrushchev, criticised him in a "secret speech", which made people in Eastern Europe hope for change.
- In October 1956 protests in Budapest brought Imre Nagy to power. He promised free elections and announced that Hungary would leave the **Warsaw Pact**.
- Leaving the **Warsaw Pact** was too much for the USSR. On 4 November Soviet tanks entered Budapest. About 3,000 Hungarians were killed, about 200,000 fled abroad, and Nagy was later executed. The West protested but didn't help, partly because it was busy with the Suez Crisis.

Czechoslovakia, 1968

- In January 1968 Alexander Dubček became leader and began the **Prague Spring**: "socialism with a human face", with less censorship, freedom to travel and some private business. He said Czechoslovakia would stay communist and in the **Warsaw Pact**.

- The Soviet leader Brezhnev feared reform would spread. In August 1968 about half a million **Warsaw Pact** troops invaded. Czechs mostly used peaceful resistance, such as removing road signs, and far fewer people were killed than in Hungary. Dubček was replaced the next year.
- The **Brezhnev Doctrine** said the USSR had the right to step in wherever communism was threatened in Eastern Europe.
- Similar to Hungary: both tried to reform, and both were crushed by force while the West did nothing. Different: Hungary tried to leave the **Warsaw Pact** and fought back; Czechoslovakia did neither.

The Berlin Wall, 1961

- Berlin was inside East Germany but split into East and West. By 1961 about 2.5 million East Germans, many of them young and skilled, had escaped to the West through West Berlin.
- This drained East Germany's workforce and embarrassed communism. On 13 August 1961 barbed wire went up overnight, soon replaced by a concrete wall with guards ordered to shoot.
- The Wall stopped the escapes and became the symbol of the Cold War. US President Kennedy visited West Berlin in 1963 to show support.

Solidarity and the collapse of Soviet control

- In 1980 strikes at the Gdańsk shipyard in Poland, led by Lech Wałęsa, created **Solidarity**, the first free trade union in the communist bloc. It soon had about 10 million members.
- In December 1981 General Jaruzelski declared martial law and banned **Solidarity**, but it survived underground. It was legalised in 1989 and won free elections that year, showing communism could be voted out.
- Gorbachev became Soviet leader in 1985. The USSR's economy was failing and the war in Afghanistan and the arms race were costly. He introduced **glasnost** (openness) and **perestroika** (restructuring) and made clear he would not use force to keep the **satellite states**.
- In 1989 Hungary opened its border with Austria, the Berlin Wall fell on 9 November, and communist governments collapsed across Eastern Europe. Germany reunited in 1990 and the USSR broke up in 1991.
- Gorbachev's choice not to send in the tanks made the collapse possible, but the people of Eastern Europe, economic failure and movements like **Solidarity** made it happen.

Key terms

Satellite state	A country that is officially independent but controlled by another, more powerful one.
Warsaw Pact	The military alliance of the USSR and its Eastern European satellites, set up in 1955.

Your notes

Prague Spring	Dubček's reforms in Czechoslovakia in 1968.
Brezhnev Doctrine	The USSR's claim that it could intervene wherever communism was threatened in Eastern Europe.
Solidarity	The independent Polish trade union led by Lech Wałęsa, founded in 1980.
Glasnost	Gorbachev's policy of openness and more freedom of speech.
Perestroika	Gorbachev's policy of restructuring the Soviet economy.

Your notes

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What did Imre Nagy announce that led to the Soviet invasion of Hungary?
2. In which year did Soviet tanks crush the Hungarian Rising?
3. Who led the Prague Spring?
4. What did Dubček call his reforms?
5. Why was the Berlin Wall built in 1961?
6. What was Solidarity?
7. Who declared martial law in Poland in 1981?
8. What does glasnost mean?

Answers

1. Hungary would leave the Warsaw Pact
2. 1956
3. Alexander Dubček
4. Socialism with a human face
5. To stop East Germans escaping to the West
6. An independent trade union in Poland
7. General Jaruzelski
8. Openness

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

Free revision for GCSE and KS3 at lycolearn.co.uk. Some notes are for one exam board only, and say so in brackets.