When Control Cracked

Trace how Soviet policy and public action changed Eastern Europe in 1989.

MWH.C.7.6.C "Explain how the Revolutions of 1989 and the weakening of Soviet control contributed to the collapse of communist governments in the Eastern Bloc."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle the change in Soviet policy, then number three connected developments in one country that show how a communist government lost power.

Eastern Europe in 1989

1. In 1989, a government in Eastern Europe could no longer assume that Moscow would rescue it. After World War II, Soviet leaders had backed communist parties across the region and used force to keep allied governments in power. Soviet troops crushed an uprising in Hungary in 1956 and helped end reform in Czechoslovakia in 1968. By the late 1980s, the Soviet Union faced severe economic problems. Its leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, pursued reforms and signaled that Soviet troops would not intervene to preserve Eastern European communist governments. This change did not remove local rulers, but it weakened the threat behind their power.

2. In Poland, the independent trade union Solidarity had survived years of repression and organized opposition to communist rule. Facing strikes and a deep economic crisis, Poland's leaders negotiated with Solidarity in early 1989. In June, voters chose Solidarity candidates for nearly every parliamentary seat they were permitted to contest. A Solidarity-led government took office that September, breaking the communist party's monopoly on power. Without a Soviet crackdown, these gains held. Meanwhile, Hungary's leaders began opening their border with Austria. Thousands of East Germans traveled through Hungary to reach the West. This route showed that people could escape the restrictions their own government tried to enforce.

3. East German leaders tried to stop people from leaving, but huge street protests demanded change. With no Soviet intervention to protect the regime, officials opened the Berlin Wall's crossings on November 9, 1989, amid confusion over new travel rules. The wall's opening made communist control look less secure across the region. In Czechoslovakia, large, mostly peaceful demonstrations helped force communist leaders to give up their monopoly on power. Romania's dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu, tried violence against protesters, but his government also fell in December. These different paths shared a crucial condition: Moscow no longer sent troops to keep these governments in place.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the change in Soviet policy weaken Eastern European communist rulers when people challenged them?

2. How did negotiations and voting in Poland turn opposition into a change in government?

3. How did Hungary's border decision put pressure on East Germany's communist leaders?

4. Why could protests in Czechoslovakia help end one-party rule in 1989 without bringing the Soviet response seen in 1968?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise an Eastern European communist leader in late 1989. In one paragraph, connect the Soviet policy change and events in at least two countries to explain why one-party rule is becoming difficult, then recommend a specific response supported by the passage.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · MWH.C.7.6.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle the change in Soviet policy, then number three connected developments in one country that show how a communist government lost power. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the change in Soviet policy weaken Eastern European communist rulers when people challenged them?	**Rulers could no longer count on Soviet troops to preserve their governments, so the threat that had helped them stay in power weakened.**
2	How did negotiations and voting in Poland turn opposition into a change in government?	**Poland's leaders negotiated with Solidarity, whose candidates then won nearly every seat they could contest. A Solidarity-led government took office.**
3	How did Hungary's border decision put pressure on East Germany's communist leaders?	**Opening the border with Austria gave thousands of East Germans a route to the West, undermining their government's efforts to keep them from leaving.**
4	Why could protests in Czechoslovakia help end one-party rule in 1989 without bringing the Soviet response seen in 1968?	**Gorbachev had signaled that Soviet troops would not intervene to preserve communist governments, unlike the Soviet use of force in 1968.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our party can no longer rely on Soviet troops if people demand a new government. In Poland, negotiations gave Solidarity a place in elections, and its candidates won nearly every seat they could contest. In East Germany, people left through Hungary while large protests challenged their leaders. Without Soviet intervention, those leaders could not hold the Berlin Wall closed. We should negotiate with opposition groups and allow competitive elections. Poland shows that talks can provide a path to a new government, while East Germany shows how quickly public pressure can overwhelm restrictions.

Accept explanations that connect weakened Soviet backing with local actions, rather than treating either as the sole cause. For the marking job, students may number Poland's negotiations, election results, and new government as a connected sequence.