Dissent in the Eastern Bloc: An Examination of Mass Movements and Resistance in the GDR, Poland, CSSR, and the Baltic States

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> "The most dangerous time for a government is when it starts to reform itself."
> – Alexis de Tocqueville

> "Historical experience shows that communists were sometimes forces by circumstances to behave rationally and agree to compromises."
> – Adam Michnik

The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe during the 1980s and the subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union itself was one of the great turning points in world history. In the space of only a few short years, the Cold War had come to an end and with it a half century of ideological and economic competition between two diametrically opposed spheres of influence. More than one sixth of the world's surface suddenly embraced democracy and free-market capitalism, while abandoning the Soviet socialist system of one-party rule and economic planning. While the role of high politics, namely of diplomacy and executive leadership, was certainly an important factor in this dramatic transformation, the role of the mass movements over half a century was an equally important contributor. This paper will therefore examine the movements that emerged throughout the Eastern Bloc nations, with particular attention paid to events in the GDR and Poland. Further emphasis will also be given the movements in the Baltic Republics with the USSR itself.

Specifically, this paper will stress not only the uniqueness of the various national movements but also examine the common aspirations, motivations, and influences that characterized the mass movements throughout Eastern Europe. First, protestors shared a common desire for political reform (i.e. for a degree of democratization) and a respect for and the need for the application of human rights and the Helsinki Accords. As the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc nations sign the accords, a fact which was later used by protestors against their governments during the events of the late 1980s, but the wording of the document itself left open the possibility for German reunification under peaceful conditions.[1] Economic motivations were also of great importance. It will be

[1] Phillip Zelikow and Condoleeza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 59-60.

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stressed that in most cases the initial motivations for protests and their driving force were economic, rather than political grievances. It was only later, once the protests had begun, that they evolved into movements for political reform and for democratization. The stagnation of the Soviet and Eastern Europe economies provided a further impetus for the desire for political reform, as communist governments found that they could no longer placate their people through social and economic subsidies.

The importance of the leadership of Moscow cannot be underestimated. In particular the differences in foreign policy, especially between Gorbachev and his predecessors was decisive to the success or failure of the mass movements. Thus, Gorbachev's hands off leadership style in relation to the Eastern Bloc nations created the circumstances in which peaceful demonstrations could succeed. Other factors that were instrumental were the role of the catholic and protestant churches in the various Eastern Bloc nations. Besides harboring dissident organizations, they provided leadership and in certain cases, legitimacy to the opposition movements. A final point to consider was the differences with regards to the approaches of the mass movements. These generally fell into two strategies; the first was namely outright opposition to the communist regimes through a popular, mass movement (as in the GDR), and the second was through a degree of cooperation with the communist state (as in Poland and Hungary).[2]

Three events defined the relationship between the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc nations and crucial to our understanding of the later mass movements of the 1980's. These events also established the degree of dissent that Moscow was willing to tolerate. The first was the GDR uprisings in the summer of 1953 following the death of Joseph Stalin in March. The collective leadership that emerged in Moscow, which included Khrushchev and Malenkov, were determined to soften the harsher aspects of Stalin's rule.[3] To that extent, they urged Walter Ulbricht (the defacto ruler of the GDR) to reduce the burden of work for state employees, and loosen political control slightly. Ulbricht complied only half-heartedly with these half-hearted measures.[4] By June, frustration in the GDR had reached the point where mass-strikes began to be organized against the communist government.

The protests began in East Berlin, the capital of the GDR, on 17 June as a workers strike and not as a mass movement for political reform.[5] In Berlin itself

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[2] In the GDR, a form of cooperation existed between the government and the opposition movement through Round Table discussions, which existed for about three months prior to the first elections in March 1990.
[3] *The Cold War*, episode 7: After Stalin (Warner Home Video, 1998).
[4] *Ibid*.
[5] Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stribbe, eds., *Revolution and resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 43.

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over 90 000 workers walked off the job, while estimate 500 000 workers (roughly 5% of the workforce) went on strike during the uprising across the GDR.[6] As such, the protestor's demands were at least initially entirely economic in nature, demanding a higher standard of living, better working conditions, and an end to the universally hated work quota system.[7] The last was a particularly forceful demand, indeed one worker later recalled that the most popular rallying cry of the early strike was the slogan "Down with the Work Quota increases!"[8] As the protests continued and spread throughout the GDR they evolved into movements for political reform. As workers were joined by students, the protestors began venting their frustrations at all signs of communist rule. They tore down the sickle and hammer, attacked government buildings, and demanded the introduction of multi-party elections.

In the face of open revolt of the streets of the GDR, the government of Walter Ulbricht was paralyzed with indecision and was thus unable to control the course of events. Indeed, for a few critical days it seemed as though the GDR regime might be on the verge of collapse. It was at this stage Moscow intervened decisively. Though the new leadership of the Soviet Union wished to introduce reforms to the Communist Bloc, open dissent could not be tolerated. Such protests were not only challenging the Soviet Union's international position, but could also end up threatening the entire Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe if such dissent were to spread to the other Eastern Bloc countries. Moscow therefore decided to deploy Soviet tanks onto the streets of East Berlin. The protests were quickly crushed and hundreds eventually arrested. So decisive was Moscow's military intervention, and the GDR's subsequent expansion of its internal security forces (known as the Stasi), that the GDR would not see a renewal of open and mass dissent until 1989.[9] The immediate effect of the events of 1953 was the tightening of border security between the FRG and West Berlin to the GDR in particular.

It is important to note that the movement of 1953 did enjoy a degree of mass support, which made it all the more alarming to Moscow. However, one segment of society that at least initially rallied behind the GDR regime was the intelligentsia. Amongst the regimes foremost supporters was Bertolt Brecht, a world-renowned playwright whose works included Mother Courage and the Good Woman of Szechuan, calling the protestor's agents of America.[10] Yet Brecht's view of the GDR government began to change as the crackdown unfolded, and he

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[6] *Ibid.*, 43.
[7] *The Cold War*, episode 7.
[8] *Ibid*.
[9] In addition, the *kasernierte Volkspolizei* (people's police) was expanded and became the precursor of the later army.
[10] Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956* (NY: Random House, 2012), 443.

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would eventually become a vocal critic of the regime. He even went so far to write a poem addressed to the government authorities, in which he indirectly criticized the government:

> The Secretary of the Writers Union had flyers distributed along the Stalin Way that said that the People had frivolously thrown away the Government's Confidence and that they could only regain it through Redoubled Work. But wouldn't it be simpler if the government simply dissolved the People and elected another?[11]

Although the opposition of the intelligentsia proved to be insufficient to prevent the Soviet crackdown, it nevertheless set a precedent that was remembered by later generations in the GDR. Indeed, the events of the 17th of June remained present in the minds of the protesters of 1989, who feared a similar reaction from Moscow and the GDR government.[12]

The second significant event that defined Soviet-Eastern Bloc relations was the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Unlike the protests in the GDR, which had begun as a strike over economic grievances, the events in Hungary were almost entirely driven by the political aspirations of the Hungarian people. The movement began when hundreds of thousands of people turned out for a state funeral on the 6th of October 1956 to honor victims of the late 1940s purges.[13] However, the protests were further energized by events in Poland, in which there was a general fear of Russian intervention. Students marched in Budapest to show solidarity with their Polish comrades, workers and student strikers collaborated in forming revolutionary committees. This was a direct challenge Moscow authority, yet such forms of popular dissent could not be unilaterally suppressed given its strictly socialist character. Instead, Imre Nagy was installed as Prime Minister as a compromise figure, in an attempt to appease the mass of demonstrators on the streets of Budapest.[14]

On October 30th Imre Nagy made a radio announcement which called for the "abrogation of the one party system and the formation of a government based on the democratic co-operation among the coalition parties of 1945."[15] This was a direct reference to the initial structure of Soviet rule in Eastern Europe. Nagy was in essence outlining a vision for the return to the pre-1949 of Communist rule, in which the Communist Party shared power in the early post-war governments with

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[11] *Ibid*.
[12] *Ibid.*, 447.
[13] T.E. Vadney, *The World since 1945: The Complete History of Global Change from 1945 to the End of the Cold War*, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 198.
[14] *Ibid.*, 199.
[15] *Ibid*.

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other political parties and organizations. Yet, what Imre Nagy, the reformers, and the protesters either all failed to grasp was the infeasibility of this process of reform being accepted by the Soviet Union, or simply hoped that the Soviets would not intervene as they had in the GDR in 1953. Stalin himself had only permitted the existence of opposition groups in the government until the Soviet Union had recovered economically from the Second World War. Yet, as troubling as Imre Nagy's pronouncements of reaching out to opposition groups were to Moscow, his announcement of non-existent negotiations with the USSR over the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary was unacceptable. As a result, on 3 November 1956 Soviet troops and tanks began to surround Budapest and to attack the city.[16] Despite heroic resistance from the citizens of Budapest, the 1956 movement was firmly crushed. In the aftermath, the Soviet Union was determined to set an example for its other satellites; Imre Nagy and other leaders of the 1956 movement were quickly rounded up, put on trial and executed in an attempt to dissuade others from deviating too far from the Soviet Union's ideological line.[17]

The events in Czechoslovakia in 1968 (known as the Prague Spring) represented the final crucial turning point between the Soviet Union and its Eastern European client states. By the 1960s the best thinking in the Eastern Bloc was that the trouble of declining rates of growth might be solved by decentralizing economic decision making and providing more incentives to the working class, in essence a move towards markets socialism.[18] This in itself was not objectionable to Moscow; indeed Romania under Ceausescu had experimented and introduced various mechanisms of capitalism, and even maintained close economic ties with the United States.[19] The Soviet Union had an increasingly import trade relationship with the western capitalist economies, as it was its primary source of industrial and high technology imports.[20]

By January 1968, after months of political infighting within the Czech Communist Party, the reform faction was able to install a new party chairman, Alexander Dubcek.[21] Though Dubcek began the process of economic reforms, he also tried to alleviate Moscow's fears that such a process might result in political reform. To that effect, Dubcek wrote the famous Warsaw Letter, which called for the preservation of one party rule, yet asserted the right of Czechoslovakia to

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[16] *Ibid.*, 200.
[17] Frederick, Taylor, *The Berlin Wall: A World Divided, 1961-1989* (NY: Harper Collins, 2006), 101.
[18] Vadney, 402.
[19] *Ibid.*, 404.
[20] Jeremi Suri, "The Promise and Failure of 'Developed Socialism': The Soviet 'Thaw' and the Crucible of the Prague Spring, 1964-1972." *Contemporary European History* 15/2 (May 2006)): 140.
[21] Vadney, 403.

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manage its internal affairs (the latter being unacceptable to Moscow).[22] Dubcek also made the mistake of welcoming Tito of Yugoslavia in August, who had broken with Moscow in the late 1940's and raised the fear that Dubcek was planning to abandon the Warsaw Pact. The Soviets, along with other Eastern Bloc countries, therefore prepared to invade Czechoslovakia to prevent such a possibility.

On August 23rd, 500 000 Warsaw Pact troops invaded and quickly occupied Czechoslovakia (though certain Warsaw Pact members, such as Romania, abstained from participating).[23] The Czech government, in contrast to what happened in Hungary in 1956, ordered its citizens to remain in their homes and not to resist.

The birth of the Brezhnev Doctrine did little more than to formalize the Soviet Union's response to its communist client states. Nevertheless, the Prague Spring is significant as it crystallized the limits of reform that Moscow was willing to tolerate. Moscow's priorities for the remainder of Brezhnev's rule were clearly established, namely the maintenance of one-party rule at all costs at the expense of economic reform under the subordination of Moscow's rule.

The first significant mass movement after the Prague Spring began in Poland during the late 1970's and early 1980's. Indeed, Poland was the first Eastern Bloc nation to break free of the Soviet Union and become independent by the late 1980's. In Poland, two decades of economic stagnation became the impetus behind the organization of opposition movements. Interestingly, it was the communist government, which spearheaded efforts to reform the Polish economy in the early 1970's, which had suffered over a decade of economic problems. The most pressure concern was how to reduce the state deficit and to make Poland's exports more competitive (see Table I for Poland's Trade Balance).

Table 1: Poland's Trade Balance, 1950-1976 (in millions of convertible zloties)[24]

	Import	Export	Balance
1950	2,673	2,537	- 137
1965	9,361	8,911	- 450
1971	16,151	15,489	- 662
1976	46,100	36,600	- 9,500

[22] Gunter Bischof, Stefan Karner, and Peter Ruggenthaler, eds., *The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010), 14-5.
[23] Vadney, 405.
[24] Norman Davies, *A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present. Vol II: God's Playground* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), 448.

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Beginning in 1970, the Polish government decided to slash state subsidies, particularly for certain foodstuffs, in an effort to decrease the burden on the state budget and to shift consumer spending to commercial products produced domestically.[25] However, this policy resulted in major price increases for basic foodstuffs (e.g., Beef went up 20% overnight) at a time when the majority of Poland's population spent almost 50% of their budget on food.[26] The results were mass protests against the rapid price increases, to which the government responded by suppressing the nation-wide strike resulting in hundreds of deaths and thousands being wounded.[27]

Yet, the Polish government was not blind to the dissatisfaction of its people. Indeed, they were particularly fearful that prolonged protests could eventually result in the result in the creation of an organized opposition. To prevent such an outcome, the government halted its program of economic reform until 1976, though this was only delaying the inevitable as Poland's economy continued to stagnate. Beginning in 1976, a new wave of price increases was introduced which resulted in the renewal of nation-wide protests. Once again, the government withdrew its program of reforms, yet the process of organizing opposition to the government had already begun as workers and intellectuals began to form local strike committees together (these were the precursors to the national Solidarity movement). The role of the Catholic Church in Poland must not be underestimated. Although it had come to an agreement with the Polish Communists, in which it agreed not to openly support opposition to the government, the Catholic Church nevertheless provided a degree of legitimacy by not denouncing the actions of the demonstrators. The Church would also act as a moderating and conservative influence upon the mass movement in Poland.

When protests resumed in 1979, the unity of the various inter-strike working committees would be instrumental in forcing the government to concede political concessions. Unable to break the unity of the strike, which by this stage was openly supported by the Catholic Church, led to the Gdansk Accords. The Gdansk Accords granted a number of political rights, including the right to form independent unions, to strike, to better working conditions, to no work on Saturdays, to less censorship, and even the right of the Catholic Church to broadcast mass via the radio.[28] The results were astonishing. By 1980 the various inter-party strike committees unified into a single organization known as Solidarity. The significance of Solidarity cannot be underestimated, for it was the first independent trade union to be recognized by the state in an Eastern Bloc country. By autumn 1981, Solidarity had 8 million members (out of a total

[25] Vadney, 407.
[26] *Ibid*.
[27] *Ibid.*, 410.
[28] *Ibid.*, 411.

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population of 35 million).[29] Led by Lech Walesa, Solidarity continued its campaigns of mass strikes and protests in an attempt to force the issue of democratization on the government.

Yet Solidarity's success was to be short lived. Shortly after the formation of Solidarity, General Jaruzelski declared Martial Law, allowing the government to systematically suppress the Solidarity movement. It is interesting to note that throughout Poland's period of political turmoil that the Soviet Union did not intervene. The exact reasons for this restraint remain unclear. It has been speculated that this was partly due to the Soviet's concern over the strength of Polish nationalism, or even due to their military preoccupation in Afghanistan.[30] Whatever the reason, Jaruzelski used the pre-text of an imminent Soviet crackdown to institute martial law, which was only lifted in 1983.[31]

Martial law and subsequent military rule did little to alleviate Poland's economic problems. By 1988, living standards had fallen below their 1978 levels, which resulted in a renewal mass demonstrations and strikes led by Solidarity.[32] On this occasion, the Polish government decided on negotiation rather than suppression. Roundtable negotiations, including representatives of the Polish communist party, Solidarity, and the Catholic Church were opened with the goal of ending Poland's political crisis. The result was the introduction of multi-party elections in which Solidarity won a landslide victory, including 99/100 seats in the Senate (only guarantee of 45% in the lower house retains the Communist presence).[33] Thus in Poland, as in Hungary, cooperation with the communist regime ensured a peaceful transition to democracy.

Before examining the events in the GDR in 1989, it is necessary to first examine the background to the opening of the Austrian-Hungarian border. As in Poland, the impetus for political reforms in Hungary was a stagnating economy. The Hungarian Communists, fearing widespread popular dissent and unrest, began to launch a series of comprehensive political reforms, one of which included the end to the communist party's monopoly on power and the introduction of democratic multi-party elections. Nevertheless, the Hungarian government remained wary of initiating too many political concessions without first seeking the consent of Gorbachev.

In a later interview, Miklos Nemeth (the current Hungarian Prime Minister) recounted a meeting between himself and Gorbachev in Moscow in which they discussed the possibility of opening the Hungarian border to Austria. Nemeth was particularly concerned given the precedence of 1956, in which the

[29] *Ibid.*, 413.
[30] *Ibid.*, 412.
[31] *Ibid.*, 485.
[32] *Ibid*.
[33] *Ibid.*, 486.

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Soviets intervened militarily in Hungary during the previous attempts at political reform. As such, he confronted Gorbachev directly, asking him whether the Soviets would deploy the Red Army in Hungary if he proceeded with the introduction of multi-party elections. Gorbachev's response, according to Nemeth, gives us an insight into Gorbachev's leadership style and its impact on the events in Eastern Europe during the late 1980s. He reportedly said, "I do not agree with the introduction of the multi-party system in Hungary, but that's not my responsibility, that's your responsibility. There will be no order to crush it down."[34] This became, in effect, the signal for political reforms to go ahead. It was a marked departure from the previous interventionist Soviet foreign policy since the time of Stalin. The significance of the events in Hungary initiated the political crisis in the GDR, as the opening of the Hungarian-Austrian border in 2 May 1989 provided an escape route for East German citizens seeking to escape to the west, and particularly the FRG.[35]

Events in the GDR during 1989 were governed by a special set of circumstances that did not exist in other Eastern Bloc countries. These included the division of Germany into zones of occupation after the war by the allies (US, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union) and the accompanying four power rights. Berlin, the former capital of Nazi Germany, was also divided into a four-power city. This eventually evolved into the creation of two separate German states, West Germany (FRG) and East Germany (GDR). Thus, any discussion of internal political reform in the GDR could not be a simple domestic issue; indeed it necessitated the participation of at least the Soviet Union if not all of the four power victors (especially if political change might result in some form of German re-unification). Eastern Germany was also seen as the prize of the Soviet Union for its victory over Nazi Germany in the Second World War. The Soviets could thus be expected not to relinquish their trophy easily and resist any attempts at reunification.

The revival of dissident groups in the GDR during the late 1970s was significant to the events in 1989. Though largely under the umbrella of protestant churches, the protection afforded by such associations ensured that a degree of organization existed to coordinate protest actions during the spontaneous uprising of 1989.[36] Shared traditions, culture and language were also important for dissidents in the GDR, as exile to the FRG was comparatively easier than in other Eastern Bloc nations (by contrast, Polish dissidents mainly went to France and Austria). Redemption in the GDR, involving the deportation and buying of GDR dissidents in jail by the FRG, created a common network of dissidents in exile. It

[34] *The Cold War*, Episode 23: The Wall Comes Down (Warner Home Video, 1998).
[35] Vadney, 488.
[36] Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 99-100.

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is estimated that the FRG bought 33 000 people, at the cost of roughly 3.5 billion reichsmarks, between the 1960s-1980s.[37]

The GDR, like the rest of the communist bloc, began to experience a period of economic stagnation after the mid 1970s. This was in part due to increasingly outdated industrial standards, heavy environmental pollution, and most importantly, low levels of industrial reinvestment.[38] The mid-1970s also saw declining rates of growth and a massive increase in the GDR government's annual deficits and overall debt (see Table 2 for the GDR's economic performance from 1970-1987).[39]

Table 2: East German Economic Performance, 1970-1987[40]

	Foreign Debt (billions of Mk)	Capital Accumulation (percent)	Productive Investment (billions of MK)	Underproductive Investment
1970	2.2	19.4	34.4	34.3
1975	11.0	17.1	42.0	41.4
1980	25.3	16.5	46.9	43.1
1985	30.0	12.0	39.6	54.0
1987	34.7	11.4	45.5	49.2

One final event to bear in mind before examining the events of 1989 was the gradual loss of support from the intelligentsia during the 1970s. This can be characterized by the treatment of Wolgang Bierman by SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) authorities. Though a committed communist, Bierrman's non-conformist views alarmed the ruling SED (to the extent that they denied his application for SED party membership in 1963).[41] While on tour in the FRG, a trip that was authorized by SED authorities, Bierrman is stripped of his GDR citizenship and forced to become a political exile in West Germany. This over handed treatment on the part of the GDR government led to massive backlash from other segments of the intellectual classes, who had previously had given support to the GDR regime.[42]

One of the causes for the emergence of the movement of 1989 was the rigged GDR elections in May. The SED, deploying public relations strategies

[37] Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 17.
[38] *Ibid.*, 16-17.
[39] *Ibid.*, 99.
[40] *Ibid*.
[41] Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 83.
[42] *Ibid*.

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from the 1950's, simply declared the victors with 98.85% of popular support.[43] In response to the SED's blatant tampering of the election results, mass protests emerge but are easily suppressed. Yet, events in Hungary at this stage would be decisive. The opening of the Hungarian border to Austria on 2 May 1989 afforded GDR citizens an escape route for the first time. Thousands sought to escape East Germany via Hungary, and when this was unsuccessful, took shelter in FRG embassies in Budapest, Warsaw and East Berlin. A standoff between the GDR and Hungary ensued, which was only broken by a compromise, which allowed GDR citizens to go to the FRG, but only by train through the GDR itself. In this way, Honecker could claim to have expelled his citizens. When the trains arrived in the GDR, and security officers came to collect the passports of the former GDR citizens, the East German government experienced for the first time the contempt to which it was held in by its people, when the passengers through their citizenship cards on the floor of the trains.[44] When the GDR finally closed its border with Hungary, GDR citizens sought shelter in FRG embassy in Prague (see Table 3 for the number of people who fled the GDR).

Table 3: GDR Exodus 1989-1990 (in thousands)[45]

1989						
	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Eastern Refugees	11.7	21.0	33.3	57.0	133.4	43.2
Unemployed Newcomers	25.9	31.9	45.3	61.7	119.9	129
1990						
	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June
Eastern Refugees	73.7	63.9	46.2	24.6	19.2	10.7
Unemployed Newcomers	132	140	132	114	100	90.4

Events proceeded rapidly in the GDR. On 10 September 1989 New Forum was founded, the first open and organized opposition movement in the GDR.[46] So popular was this organization that New Forum gained over 100 000 signatures in only three weeks and over 1 million by the end of 1989.[47] The 40th Anniversary Celebrations in GDR, and Gorbachev's accompanying visit, were also an occasion for mass protest. Throughout the celebrations, chants of "Gorby, Gorby,

[43] Vadney, 490.
[44] *The Cold War*, Episode 23.
[45] Jarausch, 62.
[46] *Ibid.*, 40.
[47] Vadney, 489.

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save us!" echoed from the crowds and even from some communist youth members.[48]

Despite Gorbachev's non-interventionist policies, GDR protestors remained fearful of the possibility of a "Chinese Solution" similar to the Tiananmen Square Crackdown in June 1989. Their fears were confirmed when the government attempted to use the Stasi to crush dissent in Leipzig and over 70 other cities throughout the GDR after the departure of Gorbachev. Yet, the SED was also gripped by a leadership succession crisis. Sensing that Honecker was losing control of events, the Politburo replaced him with Krenz on October 18th, the same day Czechoslovakia opened its borders to Hungary (within 48 hours are further 30 000 people had fled the GDR).[49]

The attempts by Krenz's government to regain control of events failed spectacularly. On 9 November, Günter Schabowski, GDR official announced the relaxation of travel restrictions but without specifying where and when these policies would take effect. Fifty thousand people quickly gathered at the Berlin Wall, and rather than fire on the crowds, the guards on their own initiative and from pressure of the crowd amongst them, opened the Berlin Wall, an action which came to signify the beginning of the end of the cold war.[50] In short, the GDR government simply lost control of the pace of events. Therefore it can be stated that the collapse of communism in the GDR was the only instance in which it was the result of a truly mass movement (ex. In Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary the regime largely led or cooperated with dissident organizations to produce political reform). Hans Modrow himself was only installed from pressure from the mass movements, which led to a period of cooperation during Round Table discussions prior to the first elections. The goals of the movement were as varied as the people who participated in the event. Yet some common objectives are apparent. Besides the introduction of democracy and respect for human rights, the protestors also demanded reunification (protestors changed their slogan from "Wir sind das Volk" (We are the People) to "Wir sind ein Volk" (We are one People)) as well as a neutral Germany, outside both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.[51]

It remains to briefly describe the movements in the Baltic States. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were considered an integral part of the USSR, and therefore represent the sole case when Gorbachev did take a hands-off approach. Such a strategy would have called into question the very existence of the Soviet Union and have led to its fragmentation, as others Soviet Republics were bound to

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[48] Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (NY: Doubleday, 1995), 524.
[49] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*. (NY: Penguin Books, 2006), 613.
[50] Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 160-1.
[51] Vadney, 491.

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demand greater autonomy or even independence once a precedent had been set. Three factors influenced the development of opposition in the Baltic; its greater exposure to western influence through Scandinavia, its prosperity in relation to Soviet standards, and its recent history of genuine independence.[52] In 1987, simultaneous demonstrations erupted in Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn to mark the anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In 1988, demonstrations broke out in Riga to mark anniversary of Latvian Independence in 1918 while in Estonia the Popular Front of Estonia was formed in April, and by May was transformed into the Estonian National Independence Movement.[53] Elections in 1989 resulted in a victory for independent candidates, while the local communist parties began to assert their independence from Moscow. A final, symbolic event occurred on August 23rd 1989 known as the Human Chain (Hands across the Baltic) in which 1.8 million people (a quarter of the Baltic's population) held hands together in a continuous chain that stretched for 650 km to mark the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.[54]

Attempts to reign in calls for independence by Gorbachev were largely ineffective; his early attempts at economic and military sanctions ended in complete failure. Military intervention in the Baltic, the only use of force during Gorbachev's tenure, began on 10th January 1991.[55] Forces of the KGB and Ministry of the Interior were deployed and attempted to disperse demonstrators by firing on the crowds, an action which left 14 dead and over 700 wounded.[56] This act signaled the end of the Soviet Union, as 150 000 protestors conveyed on Red Square in Moscow to demonstrate against the shootings.[57] Gorbachev was subsequently denounced by his previous colleagues, including Yeltsin, and forced to resign on 25 December 1991.[58]

[52] Judt, 644.
[53] *Ibid.*, 645.
[54] *Ibid.*, 645-6.
[55] *Ibid.*, 647.
[56] *Ibid*.
[57] *Ibid*.
[58] Vadney, 482.

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