

Communism East Europe

TITLE: Why did communism collapse in Eastern Europe?

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AUTHOR'S COMMENTS: I liked it. Interested to hear other people's comments.

TUTOR'S COMMENTS: Well done!! Extremely informative. Well researched. Good Layout. Stress Gorbachev's role more.

Communism is like Prohibition - it's a good idea but it won't work

(Will Rogers, 1927) (1)

This essay will give a brief introduction to communism. It will then discuss the various factors which combined to bring about the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. It will examine each of these factors and evaluate the effect of each. Finally it will attempt to ascertain whether Rogers's opinion (see above quotation) on Communism is true, that is, whether communism was truly doomed to fail from the start, or whether its collapse was a result of external influences.

Communism is based on the ideas and teachings of Karl Marx as modified by Lenin. At its most basic, the ideal of communism is a system in which everyone is seen as equal and wealth is distributed equally among the people. There is no private ownership. The state owns and controls all enterprises and property. The state is run by one leading elite. The Soviet model of communism was based on these ideals. All opposition parties were banned although parties who were sympathetic to communism and who shared the communist ideals were allowed. All power was concentrated into the hands of the Communist party. Free press and civil liberties were suppressed. Censorship and propaganda were widely used. There was state ownership of the economy. No private enterprise was allowed. There was a collectivisation of agriculture. The Communist Party invaded and controlled every aspect of political, social, cultural and economic life. It was a totalitarian state with complete Communist control over all facets of life. In the early years, and up until Gorbachev's new regime, the use of force and terror as a means of maintaining control was widespread.

The first factor which contributed to the failure and eventual collapse of communism was the fact that the Communist party's domination was illegitimate from the beginning. Lenin came to power after a bloody Civil War between those who supported Lenin and those who opposed the Soviet regime. To Lenin, defeat was unthinkable and he was prepared to make any and every sacrifice to win the war and save the revolution. The forcible requisitioning of food and supplies was approved by Lenin. This could only be achieved by enforcing strict and absolute discipline at every level of society. Terror was to become the chief instrument of power and Lenin was to assume the role of dictator. This was a phenomenon which was to become a symbol of communist regimes throughout their lifetime.

This trend was followed when Stalin came to power as leader of the Communist party and the Russian government in 1929. (2) He had achieved this through plotting and trickery and by shifting alliances. This had begun in 1924 when Stalin systematically began to remove all opposition to his claim to power. His main rival was Trotsky and he used a number of underhand measures to discredit him. For example Stalin lied to Trotsky about the date of Lenin's funeral, thus ensuring that Trotsky could not attend and thereby blackening his name in the public eye. This Stalin versus Trotsky conflict led to Trotsky being eventually exiled from Russia and, ten years later in 1940, being assassinated by one of Stalin's agents. (3)

Under Stalin any opposition was swiftly and brutally crushed. In no Eastern European country did the revolution have the support of more than a minority of people, yet this minority retained absolute control. The communist take-over and subsequent regime was achieved by undemocratic methods, that is, rigged elections, terror, totalitarian state, harassment and threats. In 1932 a two-hundred page document by a fellow member of the Politburo condemning the Stalinist regime and calling for change was published. (4) In response to this Stalin wreaked a terrible revenge. In 1936 Stalin began what became known as the 'purges' whose function it was to try members of the communist party who had acted treasonously. (5) The result of these was that five thousand party members were arrested and stripped of their membership. The sixteen defendants in the three Showtrials of 1936, 1937 and 1938 were found guilty and executed. In 1939 those who had conducted the purges were also executed. By 1939 the only member of Lenin's original Politburo who remained, was Stalin himself. (6)

In relation to foreign policy, Stalin exerted his influence to ensure that all Eastern European countries (except Yugoslavia) had Soviet-imposed puppet regimes. Stalin's domination was now total. After the war Stalin succeeded in establishing a communist buffer zone between Russia and Western Europe. Any resistance he met in establishing communist states was quickly suppressed by intimidation and terror. For example Stalin engineered a communist coup in May 1948 in Czechoslovakia in which a government minister Masaryk was killed and the president was forced to resign. (7) This served a warning to other countries against resisting the communist regime.

Therefore it can clearly be seen that from the establishment of the state that communism never had popular public support. It cannot be denied that there was a significant minority who supported communism, but these were a minority. Can an ideal and a leadership really be built on such a shallow and flimsy basis? This essay would argue that the answer to this question is no. For a leadership to lead, it must have strong support and confidence. It must be seen to work for the good of the people and not merely a vociferous minority. This, therefore, can be argued to be one of the contributing factors in the downfall of communism.

A second related factor, which had a hand in bringing about the end of communism in Eastern Europe was the fact that communism

never really had the support of the people. There was constant societal opposition to communist rule in Eastern Europe. Although this was mainly in the form of a passive rumbling dissent, there were occasional violent and active shows of opposition to communist rule. The states of Eastern Europe in the post-war period had been forced to adhere to the Moscow line. After 1956 however, with Khrushchev's new approach to Socialism and his denunciation of Stalin, there were increasing calls for independence among the communist bloc countries who had never been truly supportive of the communist regime.

In East Germany in 1953 there were a series of strikes and protests. (8) The Russians, under Stalin, used their armed forces to put down the revolt and to protect East Germany's communist government. This shows the importance of Soviet military force in maintaining communism's tenuous grip on power. It also shows how weak communist rule in East Germany really was, It was this event that sealed East Germany's fate as the USSR realised that in a united Germany, the Communists would lose control. Events eventually culminated with the building of the Berlin Wall which was the ultimate expression of Soviet and communist force and coercion in maintaining the communist regime.

Under Khrushchev, who had succeeded Stalin after his death in 1953, Poland was the first to revolt against the communist regime. Polish workers rioted and went on strike in 1956 and the Polish communist party also revolted by refusing to accept the Russian general Rokossovsky as the Polish Minister for Defence. (9) The situation was diffused by a compromise which was made on both sides, with Poland agreeing to remain in the communist Eastern bloc if the nationalist communist leader Gomulka, who had been imprisoned by Stalin, was reinstated. The fact that Khrushchev was willing to compromise illustrates again the precarious position of communist rule.

The Hungarian revolution of 1956 was borne out of the relative success of the Poles in achieving concessions for the Moscow leadership. (10) The Hungarians decided to overthrow the Stalinist regime in their country. The situation quickly deteriorated and on the 23rd of October the Hungarian troops, who had been dispatched to end the riots, joined the civilians in revolution. Soviet troops were called in and the Hungarian communist party lost the little support which they had. Again Khrushchev tried to diffuse the situation by offering a compromise, that is, the reinstatement of the moderate communist leader Nagy. When it became clear, however, that Nagy had every intention of pulling out of the Soviet communist bloc, Khrushchev resorted to force and violence to maintain the communist grip on Hungary. He ordered the return of Soviet tanks and troops to Budapest on November 4th 1956. (11) Thousands were killed in a bloody street battle until the Soviets had re-established their control. Nagy was arrested and was executed two years later. A Soviet imposed communist regime under Janos Kadar was set up. (12) The tenuous communist grip on control is again illustrated here. Khrushchev was willing to barter, and eventually use force, to maintain Soviet control. Without this force and coercion, however, Hungary would have established its own brand of communist rule. Khrushchev could not risk the domino effect that this action would have had on the Eastern bloc. This

societal opposition can, therefore, be taken to be another contributing factor in the downfall of communist rule in the Eastern bloc. If those in the alliance cannot cooperate and work together, the alliance and the ideal cannot hope to survive.

Another important factor which this essay will discuss is that of the influence of the West on the Eastern bloc. The Eastern bloc was already aware of Western capitalist success as they were allies during the war. Many of the Eastern countries, for example Hungary under Nagy or Czechoslovakia under Dubcek, were in favour of a communist system with some elements of capitalism, that is, a mixed economy or market socialism and more elements of democracy. There had been a breakdown in relations between the East and West due to tensions after WWII. After the war Russia wanted to create a sphere of influence in the East over which the West would have no say or control. This was not acceptable to the West who wanted to see democracy installed in the East and who wanted to have a continued input into the doings of the East. This conflict eventually led to the Cold War.

Until Khrushchev became leader of the Soviet bloc, there had been no significant contact between the two blocs. Those inside of the Soviet bloc were completely cut off from the Western ideals. When Khrushchev came to power, however, there was renewed hope in the West that there might be a thaw in relations between the two blocs. Relations between the two blocs did improve with Khrushchev attending a number of conferences and meetings. For example a twelve-day visit to the US in 1959, a UN General Assembly, also in 1959 and a later UN General Assembly meeting in 1960 in the US. (13) Although then relations began to break down again due to the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, and the Eastern bloc became cut off once more, western ideas had already managed to penetrate the East. (14) The information that the capitalist West was thriving while the Communist Eastern bloc was stagnating and underdeveloped, made communism and Soviet control even more unpopular.

In 1963 there again was an easing of tensions between the two blocs when Russia and the US signed a test ban treaty which allowed the West's influence to again creep into the East. (15) In 1964 Khrushchev was ousted from power and Brezhnev with Kosygin took over from him. (16) In 1966 the US and USSR agreed to a direct air service between Moscow and New York. In 1967 they, along with 60 other countries, signed the first international treaty providing for the peaceful exploration of outer space. (17) In the 1970s a period of détente began. In 1970 West Germany and Poland signed a treaty rejecting the use of force. West Germany and Russia ratified a similar treaty in 1972. (18) In 1972 Nixon and Brezhnev signed the SALT I treaty which was to limit the production of US and Russian nuclear weapons. In 1973 East and West Germany joined the UN. (19) Throughout this period the West had more and more access to the Eastern bloc and the people of the communist countries were influenced by these ideas. This was a further blow to communist rule and another factor in the downfall of communism.

The next contributing factor to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe was that of its economic failure. During the years

of war communism from 1918-1921, Soviet labourers worked for pittance wages. At the same time the Bolshevik confiscated virtually all harvests. This brought the country to the brink of economic collapse. The net result of war communism under Lenin was that from 1914 the countryside was neglected and destroyed and in 1920 there was a severe drought. (20) In 1921 the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced. This was in effect a limited capitalism. Peasants were allowed to keep their surpluses after taxes were paid. Bonuses, extra rations and better housing were offered as incentives. Still there was widespread opposition to the communist policy with the beginnings of a peasant war against Stalin's proposed collectivisation policy in 1928. (21) Although agricultural production increased, the standard of living was lowered and hardship was widespread. Forcible collectivisation was pursued until 1935. This again shows the people's general opposition to communist policies. Collectivisation failed to meet agricultural requirements during WWII. The human cost of the policy was staggering. If the people are suffering under a particular regime they will not support it, how then can this regime hope to survive?

When Khrushchev came to power, he too failed to salvage the economy. Although some of the policies which he introduced in the 1950s had an initial success, they soon collapsed with disastrous effects. Figures for meat in 1958 were artificially high but collapsed soon after. In 1962 there were sharp increases in the prices of butter and meat. (22) Food riots were forcibly quelled by the shooting of seventy unarmed demonstrators in 1962. (23) Industry was not faring any better and by 1963 production levels had declined sharply in every branch of industry. As Khrushchev himself said of communism in 1958:- "If, after forty years of communism, a person cannot have a glass of milk and a pair of shoes, he will not believe that communism is a good thing" (24)

Under Brezhnev the economic state of the USSR continued to decline. Support for communism was falling and due to improved relations with the West, the people could see how disadvantaged they were. Under Andropov who succeeded Brezhnev in 1982 the situation did not improve. Change began only when Gorbachev came to power in 1985. (25) The major problems in the economy which Gorbachev had to deal with were, the wasteful use of resources, the lack of innovation, a poor division of labour, too many costly products being produced, ineffective use of resources and low productivity. There was a resistance to technological innovation due to a lack of incentives. Wages were low and the mechanisms involved in introducing a new idea or practice were time-consuming and complicated. There was a general inflexibility in the enterprise network which also stifled innovation. There was also a lack of investment in new ideas and industry. Gorbachev's solution to these problems was a "Perestroika" of the economy.

The challenge of Perestroika was to move to more intensive methods of production and more effective use of inputs. His economic policies began with the promise of a revival of some of the practices of NEP. His aim was to cause output to double by the year 2000 and for production and productivity to rise substantially. It was not until 1987, however, that these

ideas were put into a concrete plan. (26) A vigorous anti-alcohol campaign was initiated. Vineyards were destroyed and beer production was cut-back. By 1988, however, they had to admit that this policy was a complete failure and it was abandoned in 1990. (27) By 1985 the USSR had a budget deficit of R37 billion. (28) Due to miscalculations in relation to the extent of the budget deficit, Gorbachev authorised spending in social and investment sectors while maintaining the spending in the military sector. This was a gross mistake which resulted in the budget deficit in 1989 having increased to R100 billion or 11% of the Gross National Product (GNP) and was predicted to rise to R120 billion. Therefore, under Gorbachev, the budget deficit rose from 3% in 1985 to 14% in 1989. (29) Inflation increased to over 5%. (30) Prices failed to reflect the high cost of production and many companies were working at a loss. This economic failure of communism meant that support for the system fell and that it was becoming increasingly more difficult for the communist party to convince the people that this indeed was the way forward, and a better solution than capitalism.

Gorbachev therefore aimed to tie salaries into achieved results and to remove subsidies on some goods and services. He did not act immediately, however, with his price reform package as he hoped to first achieve a balance between supply and demand. This merely worsened matters and wages continued to rise faster than output and productivity. The main failure of Perestroika is that it didn't remove the old price system. Instead, it allowed the old price system, which was based on scarcity, to continue, and this merely exacerbated shortages. Ironically, it was the mass organisations of people, who had emerged to defend living standards, who actually hampered the struggle against inflation and the budget deficit. This situation was partly created by the fact that the governing party had no popular support and hadn't been popularly elected. The economic situation continued to decline. There was a zero growth rate. Shops were calculated to be lacking 243 out of 276 basic consumer items and there was a chronic shortage of 1000 items out of 1200 which would be on a model shopping list. There was a static farm output and high levels of inflation. (31) Therefore it can be seen that communism was an economic disaster. Khrushchev's remark again can be used to illustrate the effect which this had on the support for communism. (see ref 24).

As previously mentioned, communism never had majority support or a legitimate political basis. Force and coercion were regularly used to ensure that the communist party remained in power. Therefore one can maintain that the fact that communism was a political failure was also a contributing factor to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. If a party has not got the support of a majority, then it has a weak political basis. The fact that undemocratic means were used to ensure that the communists came to, and then maintained, power shows that communism was a political failure. Throughout the history of communism in Russia, never once did the party gain a majority support or truly succeed in suppressing public demonstrations of antipathy towards communism. It can therefore be argued that a political leadership with no political basis or support could ever hope to survive.

Another important factor to note is communism's utter failure in relation to society and culture. Soviet society under Communist rule was socially and culturally underdeveloped. The state had a say in every aspect of societal life. In response to low birth rates, large numbers of orphans and the failure of 37/100 marriages in 1934 alone, the communist leadership compelled the media to promote stable family life. (32) Propaganda was used to coerce the people into believing in the positive virtues of marriage and children. Divorce was made more difficult and abortion was prohibited. Thus the people's right to choose and exert control over their own personal and familial decisions was removed. In schools, the teaching of the social sciences was curtailed and Marxist and Leninist theories were expounded. In the late thirties fees were reintroduced for the three upper forms of secondary school. This effectively meant that only those who could afford to pay these fees could send their children on to further academic training as these were the forms which prepared children for higher education. (33) Under Stalin topographical, economic and political information and affairs were a state secret. Maps were inaccurate and details about past disasters and history were omitted or embellished.

Propaganda and brainwashing was used to ensure that the virtues of communism were extolled and a cult following was created around Lenin and Stalin. "A Short Course on the History of the CPSU" became the staple intellectual diet of all schoolchildren. (34) This was a propagandistic book based on an idealistic view of communism and its leaders. The mass arrests, the truth of the purges and the labour camps were not allowed to be discussed in the media. State monopoly of information and mass communications deployed in this way, and backed by the use of coercion and force and the military, degraded the nation's intellectual and cultural life. People were simply not allowed to form an opinion contrary to that of the communist state. People were also not allowed to choose their own religion or follow their own personal religious beliefs. The state outlawed and censored religious "propaganda" and publications. The Soviet state actively and brutally persecuted the churches. A large number of these were desecrated or destroyed. More than half of all monasteries were forced to close and in 1921 twenty-eight bishops were arrested or died in violent clashes with the Soviet military. (35) Attempts were also made to split the church from the inside. By 1939 only 12 bishops, out of the 163 who had been active in 1930, remained. (36) These repressive measures, as a whole, meant that the growth of Soviet culture and society was stunted and stagnating. The secrecy and lies undermined efficiency, isolated individuals and eroded the morale of society. This was compounded by the fact that, due to Western influences, the public in the communist countries were beginning to realise their predicament and their backwardness. These measures continued until Gorbachev came to power.

This point leads onto the most important factor which contributed to the eventual collapse of communism in the East, that is, Gorbachev. Without Gorbachev it is doubtful that the disintegration of the communist regime would have occurred so soon. Gorbachev can be seen as a reform communist. He introduced a number of revolutionary reforms like Perestroika and Glasnost. The combined effect of these policies, and his general attitude

to reform, communism and the USSR, had the effect of causing the culmination of all opposition to communism and collapsing the system.

Glasnost proved to be a great relief valve which allowed the people to voice their long-standing discontent about communism and the communist regime as a whole. The positive elements of Glasnost had the effect of bringing national tensions to the surface of political and social life and, in a sense, exacerbating the national problem. Liberalisation made people less afraid of retribution when they spoke out against the injustices of the system and the atrocities which had occurred. The ripple effect of Gorbachev's radical Perestroika and Glasnost weakened the authority of the communist governments - economically, socially and ideologically. Above all the failure of communism lay in the failure of Gorbachev's Perestroika. If the economy had improved then so too would the people's well-being and they may have considered maintaining the communist regime.

The fundamental problem with Perestroika was how to change a system which had been built to withstand change. It was increasingly fractured. It had originally been based on inaccurate figures about the well-being of the economy and the national debt. Life under Perestroika became even harder for the majority of Soviet people. There were no state-employed social groups or skilled workers who stood to gain from Perestroika in the short term. Economic reform involved hard work and higher prices and therefore Perestroika was short on support. As the economic situation worsened, so too did the people's support for communism fall. This time there was a difference however. Due to Glasnost the people and the media were now free to criticise the policy.

Glasnost had the effect of ensuring that the previous reign of terror which the communist leadership had held, was brought to an end. Gorbachev employed a policy of 'Glasnost', that is, openness and the right to criticise and express an opinion. Up until then Soviet society was closed. No criticism or freedom of speech was allowed. The major feature of Glasnost is that of the lifting of most of the restrictions which had been imposed on the circulation of information since communism began. The blank pages in history were about to be filled in. Gorbachev realised that the former policy of absolute secrecy was a major force holding back the development of society. Censorship was relaxed. This had the adverse effect of allowing the public criticism of a regime which previously could not be criticised.

Gorbachev also allowed increasing independence to the Eastern bloc states. He had come to the conclusion that compelling an unwilling population to live under a system they detested was not ensuring the USSR's security, but on the contrary, jeopardising it. He indicated by omission, rather than by direct statement, that he would not obstruct a change which would result in these states achieving a measure of independence.

In Czechoslovakia on the 18th of January 1989 there was a decision taken to legalise Solidarity. (37) On the 10th of February the Hungarian communists agreed to a multi-party system

and there was no opposition to this on the part of the Soviets. On 29th March Moscow told the Hungarians that they would not interfere in East European affairs. (38) In Poland on January 18th, Solidarity had been legalised after a string of protests and riots in Hungary. (39) This led to an agreement between the communist government and Solidarity, the main focus of which was the holding of the first relatively free elections since the 1940s in Poland. The elections were devastating to the communists. They were swept out of the Senate and did not have any representatives elected to the Sejm until the second round of counting. (40)

This had a domino effect and hastened events elsewhere. Far from Gorbachev's original hope that allowing the Eastern states more freedom would bring the union closer together, it was tearing the union apart. Kadar was ousted from Hungary and the communists were swept aside by the Hungarian Democratic Forum. On September 11th Hungary opened its borders with Austria and allowed thousands of East Germans to cross to the west. (41) The people of East Germany were demanding Glasnost and Perestroika. On October 9th a mass demonstration of 70,000 people occurred in Leipzig. (42) Thousands of Germans were escaping to the west through Hungary and the GDR was powerless to stop them. Honecker, the East German leader, buckled under the pressure and resigned. The net effect of which was that his successors allowed the opening of the Berlin Wall on 8th November 1989 after the East German government and communist leadership resigned. (43)

On the 24th of November the Czechoslovak Communist Party resigned after mass demonstrations in Prague of up to 800,000 people. On the 7th of December the communist government in Czechoslovakia collapsed entirely and a new non-communist government was formed. (44)

Gorbachev's reforms were wreaking havoc on the communist system. Its base, already weak and fragile, began to crumble away under the massive wave of anti-communist feeling which had finally come to the fore after years of suppression. On the 11th of December Bulgarian communists were forced to agree to a multi-party system and on the 25th, the Rumanian leader Ceausescu and his wife were tried and executed. (45) All of this was borne out of Gorbachev's reforms. The communist regime had been built on force and coercion, terror and undemocratic methods. This regime could therefore not be expected to survive under such an onslaught. In refusing the Eastern bloc communist parties aid to suppress the revolts within, Gorbachev effectively sealed their fate. The communist parties in those countries had always relied on Soviet force for support in maintaining control of the countries, now that his support had been removed the regimes crumbled. Therefore the significance of the Gorbachev factor cannot be denied when discussing the downfall of communism in Eastern Europe. If Gorbachev had not introduced his reforms or had not refused aid to the other Eastern bloc communist parties, the communist regime may have still stood today. Gorbachev may not have been the cause of the downfall, but he was certainly the trigger. The situation was like a fuse, Gorbachev merely provided the matches and refused to stop the fire.

The final factor which this essay will examine, is that of the

loss of elite party confidence. With his reforms Gorbachev had undermined the morale and confidence of the party elite. It had become clear that the communist cause had exhausted itself and was a failure. Their utopian hopes had been torn apart one by one throughout the years and Gorbachev had made them face this fact. This had a paralysing effect on them and led to their apathy about the ending of communism. If they had believed that there was something left to fight for they may have used physical force to overthrow Gorbachev and suppress the revolts, but they did not. Gorbachev had launched a step-by-step dismantling of the party and the nomenklatura under Perestroika. He separated and neutralised his most militant opponents among the conservative members of the party elite. At the 28th Congress the party elite was divided between those who would monitor the development of Glasnost and perestroika, and the Presidency who would champion the fight against the unreformable members of the nomenklatura. (46) Until the 28th Congress membership of the nomenklatura had been a ticket to wealth and power, after the conference it became a mere shell. Membership fell off and loyalties faded. A form of local government control was implemented by Gorbachev to further diminish the role of the Politburo. Piece by piece Gorbachev was chipping away at the old elite's confidence and beliefs. The fact that Gorbachev was gaining support both from the public at home and abroad, further eroded their confidence.

When the USSR began to collapse, however, certain voices in the party refused to allow Gorbachev to dismantle more of their dreams. Yelstin was emerging at this time as an opponent to Gorbachev's rule. In response Gorbachev banned a pro-Yelstin rally in Moscow in 1991. (47) Alarmed at a series of political strikes and a growing support for Yelstin, Gorbachev negotiated a compromise which stipulated that in return for an end to political strikes, Gorbachev would negotiate a new Union treaty which would give power to the republics. The day before this treaty was to be signed, however, its opponents moved to forestall it. Pugo announced that he was assuming presidential control as Gorbachev was ill and declared a state of emergency. (48) Gorbachev refused to concur with this announcement. Yelstin called for a general strike and said that the emergency government was unconstitutional. (49) Some workers went on strike, more did not. Battle lines were being drawn and the complete collapse of communism was not far behind. The leaders of the coup were arrested by Gorbachev's men and Gorbachev returned to Moscow.

The failed coup ironically however, had precipitated the process it had been trying to prevent, that is, the break up of the USSR and the demise of the communist party. In the Russian parliament Yelstin signed a decree suspending the communist party pending an investigation of the coup. Gorbachev had triumphed over the plotters but now had to capitulate to Yelstin. After a vain attempt at protest, Gorbachev resigned as General Secretary of the CPSU and recommended that the General Committee should disband itself. In June 1991 Yelstin was elected president of Russia. (50) After the failure of the coup most of the Soviet republics declared their independence and sovereignty. Gorbachev tried unsuccessfully to revive the Union treaty for several months afterwards, but to no avail. The chain of events had been set in motion and could not be stopped now.

On the 8th of December 1991 Yelstin, along with the Belorussian and Ukraine leaders issued a statement which declared the end of the USSR. They offered a Commonwealth of Independent States in return and invited other countries to join. (51) Gorbachev protested at first but then bowed to the inevitable. Communism in Eastern Europe had collapsed. On the 25th of December 1991, he tendered his resignation as president of the USSR and the communist flag was lowered from the Kremlin dome to be replaced by the Russian tricolour. (52)

Communism in Eastern Europe, therefore, collapsed for a number of reasons. It had no political basis or popular support. It was riddled with economic problems and, in comparison to capitalism, was a complete failure. Finally the Gorbachev factor and the loss of elitist party confidence fanned the flames and destroyed communism. Communism broke down because of fatal weaknesses built into the system from its inception. It is in a human's nature to aim for success and prosperity. Communism denies the competitive trait which is inherent in all humans. Communism was rejected because it is not as good as alternative systems of satisfying humans material wants. Communism also is at odds with the other most basic instinct which a human has, that is, the desire for freedom. Communism, in practice, denied the expression of civil liberties, opinions and thought. It was also a forced rule which was only enforced by terror, not acceptance or majority ruling. Such a regime could only hope to last for a certain period, never indefinitely. Gorbachev's reforms were merely the catalyst for this failure. Gorbachev wished to reform the system, not destroy it, but the situation rapidly went out of control as years of pent-up frustration and antipathy toward the communist regime was finally given expression.

Can we therefore validate the quotation by Rogers which was made at the start of this essay? This essay would argue yes. A regime which is inherently against human nature can never hope to succeed. It is human to want what we cannot have and to be denied it, as with prohibition, makes us all the more determined and curious to achieve that which is forbidden. The same can be said to be true for communism. Therefore this essay would conclude that although there were a number of external contributory influence to the collapse of communism, communism as an ideal cannot hope to survive for long in anything more than a theoretical sense, as it is inherently contrary to the basic drives of human nature.

#### FOOTNOTES

(1) Various Inputs, Chronicle of the 20th Century Quotations (Guinness Publishing Ltd., 1996) page 36

(2) Various Inputs, World Book Encyclopaedias (World Book Inc., 1984) page 727

(3) Kehoe, A.M, Makers of 20th Century Europe (Mentor Publications Ltd., 1988) page 25

(4) Ibid., page 32

(5) Ibid.

- (6) Ibid., page 33
- (7) Ibid., page 40
- (8) O' E Brien, Eileen, *Modern Europe 1870-1966* (Mentor Publications Ltd., 1995) page 231
- (9) Kehoe, A.M, op cit., page 50
- (10) Ibid.
- (11) Ibid.
- (12) Ibid.
- (13) Ibid., page 52
- (14) Ibid.
- (15) *Various Inputs*, op cit. (1984) page 618b
- (16) Ibid., page 618a
- (17) Ibid., page 618b
- (18) Ibid.
- (19) Ibid.
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- (21) Ibid.
- (22) Ibid., page 55
- (23) Ibid.
- (24) *Various Inputs*, op cit. (1996) page 142
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- (26) Ibid.
- (27) Ibid., page 272
- (28) Ibid.
- (29) Ibid.
- (30) Ibid.
- (31) Ibid., page 281
- (32) Hosking, Geoffrey, *A History of the Soviet Union* (Fontana Press, 1992) page 213
- (33) Ibid., page 215

- (34) Ibid., page 218
- (35) Ibid., page 228
- (36) Ibid., page 235
- (37) Ibid., page 245
- (38) Ibid.
- (39) Ibid.
- (40) Ibid.
- (41) Ibid., page 466
- (42) Ibid.
- (43) Ibid.
- (44) Ibid.
- (45) Ibid., page 468
- (46) Novikov, Euvgeny & Bascio, Patrick, Gorbachev and the Collapse of the Soviet Communist Party (Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1994) page 68
- (47) Hosking, Geoffrey, op cit. page 494
- (48) Ibid., page 495
- (49) Ibid.
- (50) Ibid., page 497
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- (52) Ibid.

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