

USSR's Economic and Social Problems

Cold War ended as USSR couldn't cope with Arms Race and global overstretch and so tried to revive Détente.

The Communist system had weaknesses: unrealistic planning objectives, poor quality of goods due to lack of competition, workforce lacked motivation as living standards didn't improve, social problems - alcoholism, absenteeism. EE countries were even more frustrated being right next to successful capitalist ones. However, the system wasn't entirely broken. During the 70s the USSR had growth and economic success and was more stable while the USA suffered from the oil price rise and inflation.

EE had economic stagnation by 80s because industry hadn't modernised and had reached its limits. Too much spending had gone into arms. There were two fundamental problems: agriculture - labour shortage, fertilizer damage, irrigation caused loss of resources - and oil shortage - significant fall in USSR production by 30%, hitting exports and damaged Comecon relations since they needed regular supply. Oil growth rate fell to 1.8%, had been 8% in the 60s.

The planned economy was being undermined. USSR was failing to deliver and the infrastructure was outdated. BS's economic and social unrest increased.

Importance of West influence and Arms Race

West applied more pressure with Afghanistan than any BS.

Reagan's Star Wars meant the US could actually win a future nuclear conflict, increasing US confidence. The increased defence spending put USSR at a disadvantage with its stagnant economy and weaker tech.

However, Soviet military spending was already high and didn't increase in response to the arms race. The problem was the falling economic growth, not western pressure. USA also only put on limited direct pressure, with trade continuing and investments in EE. West did more pressure on communists in the developing world, but that didn't affect the USSR as much as Afghanistan.

A new Détente briefly happened 1985-8, indicating the USSR was susceptible to pressure. Gorbachev stopped increasing SS-20 missiles April 1985 and tried to persuade Reagan to stop Star Wars. He succeeded in getting a total withdrawal of medium range missiles from Europe. This was accompanied by talks with China, clearly showing the USSR needed to reduce conflict and spending.

Gorbachev's Glasnost and Perestroika

Perestroika - reconstruction. Allow the economy more freedom, relaxing central control.

Glasnost - openness. Allow more freedom of speech. State controls of media were relaxed 1986.

Gorbachev's Glasnost and Perestroika (cont)

Gorb proposed changes Jan 1987 including greater public participation, more accountable officials, multi-candidate elections by secret ballot for locals and party organisation. Private enterprise was allowed in some industries June. These changes divided the party; some hardliner communists felt this was too much, others wanted more. This meant the Communist party's power weakened, allowing other organisations to form.

The changes weren't great. The private industries were inefficient and long-term problems continued with more shortages and the disruption causing job loss.

Feb 1989 saw elections for new Congress which saw the loss of many in the Communist party and allowed new leaders from outside to enter. Congress took on the role of a Parliament and in 1990 the Communists' official dominance ended. This meant the control it had that held the BS together weakened and the empire fell apart.

EE was divided over the changes; Poland (thanks to Solidarity), Hungary and Bulgaria were eager, EG and Romania showed little desire for change. But Gorb wasn't going to tolerate those who didn't introduce his reforms by 1989.

Thus, internal changes were a greater cause of the end of the Cold War than Western pressure.



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