

# Crisis and Conflict

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The End of the  
Cold War

# Was the end of the Cold War inevitable?

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graph TD; Title[Was the end of the Cold War inevitable?]; Title --> Q1[Why wasn't the Communist government working?]; Title --> Q2[How did Gorbachev try to get the Communist system to work again?]; Title --> Q3[What effect did Gorbachev's changes have on Eastern Europe?]; Title --> Q4[Why did the Soviet Union break up?]; A1[This part looks at the problems with the USSR's economy and government.] --> Q1; A2[This part looks at Gorbachev's reforms.] --> Q2; A3[This part looks at how Eastern Europe was affected by Gorbachev's reforms.] --> Q3; A4[This examines why the USSR ended.] --> Q4;
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Why wasn't the Communist government working?

This part looks at the problems with the USSR's economy and government.

How did Gorbachev try to get the Communist system to work again?

This part looks at Gorbachev's reforms.

What effect did Gorbachev's changes have on Eastern Europe?

This part looks at how Eastern Europe was affected by Gorbachev's reforms.

Why did the Soviet Union break up?

This examines why the USSR ended.

# In a Nutshell

- In 1991, the Cold War came to an end.
- There were many causes to this.
- In Eastern Europe, many people did not want the USSR to control their countries.
- By the late 1980s, the USSR was facing many economic problems.
- People in the Soviet Union were unhappy with the government for its failure to meet the people's needs.
- The reforms introduced by Gorbachev caused new problems.
- All these resulted in the breakdown of Communism in the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

# **Why wasn't the Communist system working?**



**Internal reasons**

**External reasons**

# Inefficient economy

- The Soviet Union employed a system referred to as the 'command economy'.
- However by the late 1970s and the early 1980s, this system started to show signs of inefficiency.
- Soviet Union citizens could not get basic goods such as food and clothing.
- Furthermore, the command economy had resulted in the lack of consumer goods which could have earned profit for the government.

# Poor decisions by central government

- The central government had been making bad decisions.
- Usually it was not aware of the local conditions and the problems of the people.
- Due to the size of the USSR, local conditions were very different in every region.
- It was hence hard for the central government to make decisions that were suitable for all parts of the country.



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# Slow decisions by central government

- Very often, factory managers had to wait for a long time for decisions to be made by the central government on production.
- Thus, goods took an even longer time to reach the shops.
- This created a lot of discontentment within the people who found the government to be ineffective.

# No quality control

- The central government focused on targets that were easy to measure.
- Targets were only set for quantity but not quality.
- Goods produced were often poor in quality.
- Many customer were unhappy with the level of quality in Soviet goods.

# No incentive to work hard

- In a Communist society, everyone worked for the state.
- There was no reward or incentive to work hard since all were given the same benefits.
- All Soviet workers were guaranteed jobs for life.
- As a result Soviet workers became less efficient than their capitalist counterparts.

# Most of the money was spent on the military

- Years of Cold War and the arms race had led to heavy spending on building the military.
- In some years, the military took up 50% of the government expenditure.
- As a result, there was little left to produce consumer goods which created a shortage.

# Few consumer goods were made

- The emphasis on heavy industry and military meant little attention was paid to consumer goods.
- The quality of life in the USSR was much worse compared to capitalist countries.

Consumer goods	USSR	USA
Motorcars	5	398
TV sets	82	376
Refrigerators	40	293
Washing Machines	37	259

# Alcoholism made workers less efficient

- Alcoholism was a major problem in the USSR.
- One major cause was the relatively cheap price of alcohol and the lack of other consumer goods for workers to spend on.
- Alcoholism created health-related problems as well as social problems.
- All these had a bad effect on the productivity of the workforce in the USSR.

# Farms and factories were not improved

- The central government had not improved the farms with technology.
- Factories were still using obsolete methods and machines for production.
- Thus, the USSR could not catch up with the West in terms of production.

# Inefficient transport and distribution system

- The USSR's infrastructure of transport and distribution system was not organized efficiently.
- This was also partly caused by the vastness of the USSR.
- Factories were located far away from the raw materials that were needed.
- Due to inefficient transport methods, much crops were wasted due to long waiting time.

# Basic needs of the people not met

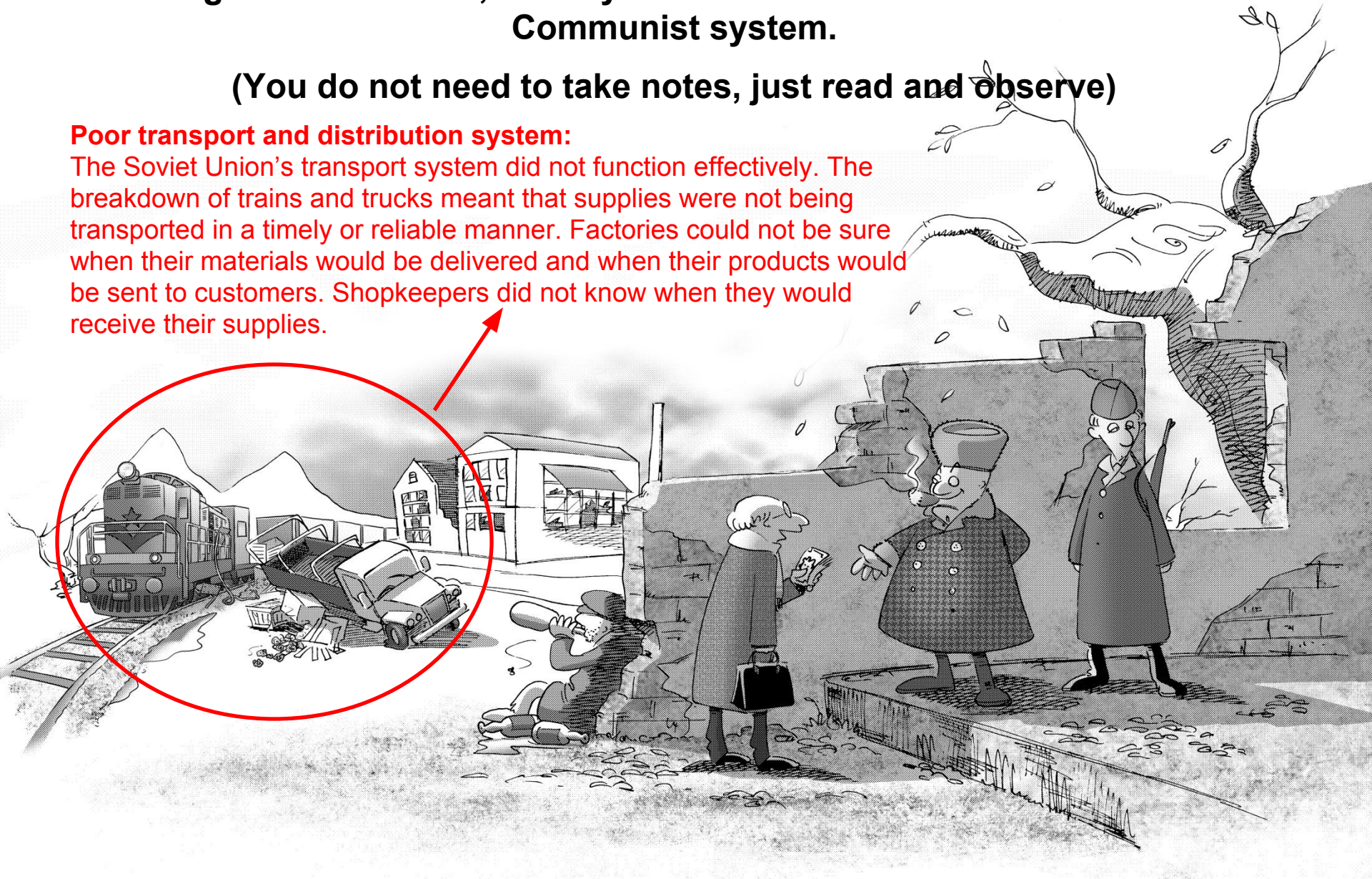
- The command economy could not provide the people with the basic necessities.
- With the increase in demand for consumer goods, a 'black market' developed.
- Government officials who controlled the goods that were in short supply often became corrupt, selling goods only to people who could offer them a high price.
- The black market also meant the government lost a great deal of revenue.

# Using this illustration, identify the reasons behind the failure of the Communist system.

(You do not need to take notes, just read and observe)

## Poor transport and distribution system:

The Soviet Union's transport system did not function effectively. The breakdown of trains and trucks meant that supplies were not being transported in a timely or reliable manner. Factories could not be sure when their materials would be delivered and when their products would be sent to customers. Shopkeepers did not know when they would receive their supplies.



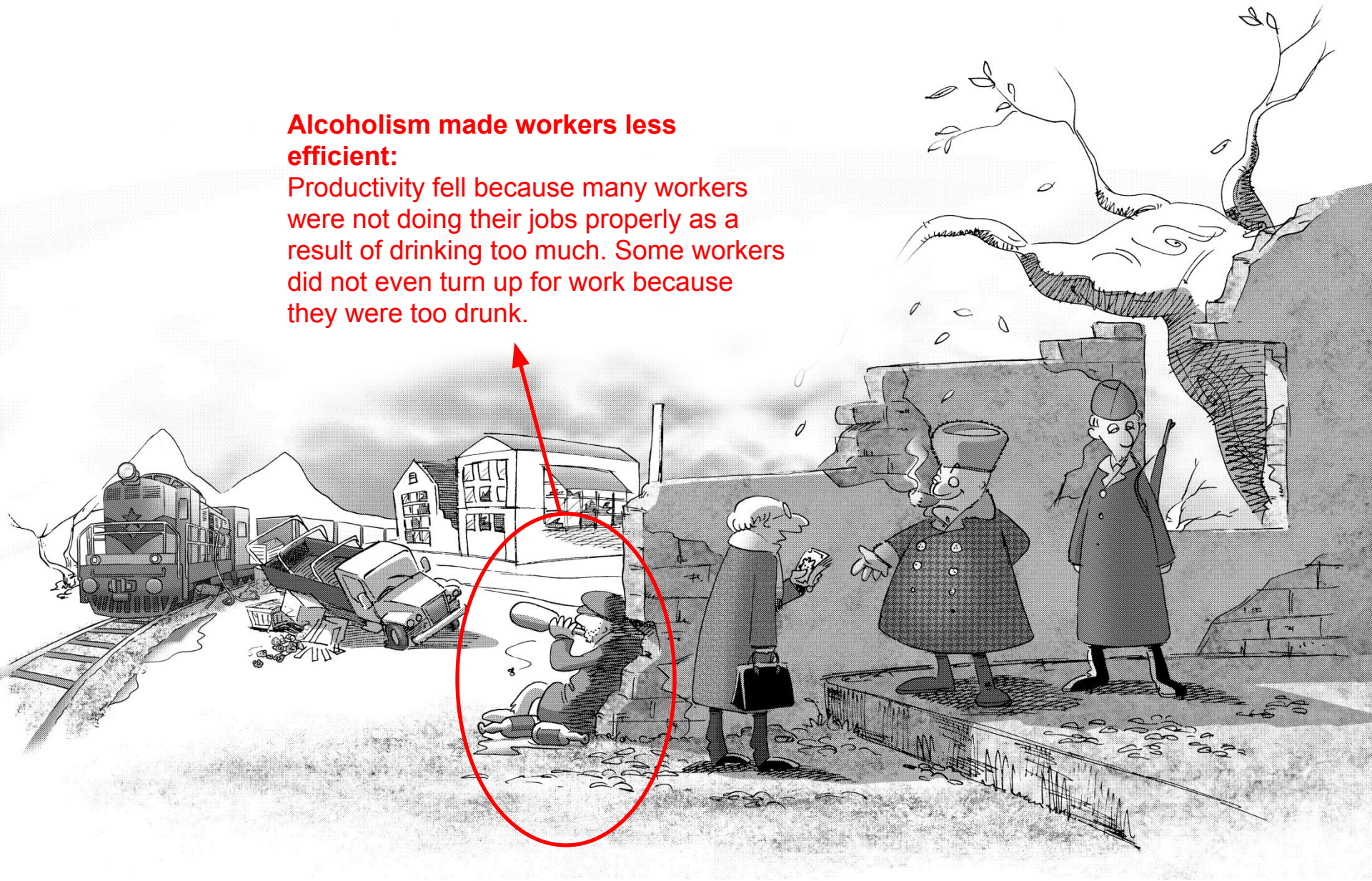
**Factories were not improved:**

Factories were not well-maintained. While the Soviets felt that it was important to improve their military technology, they neglected to also improve technology in civilian areas.



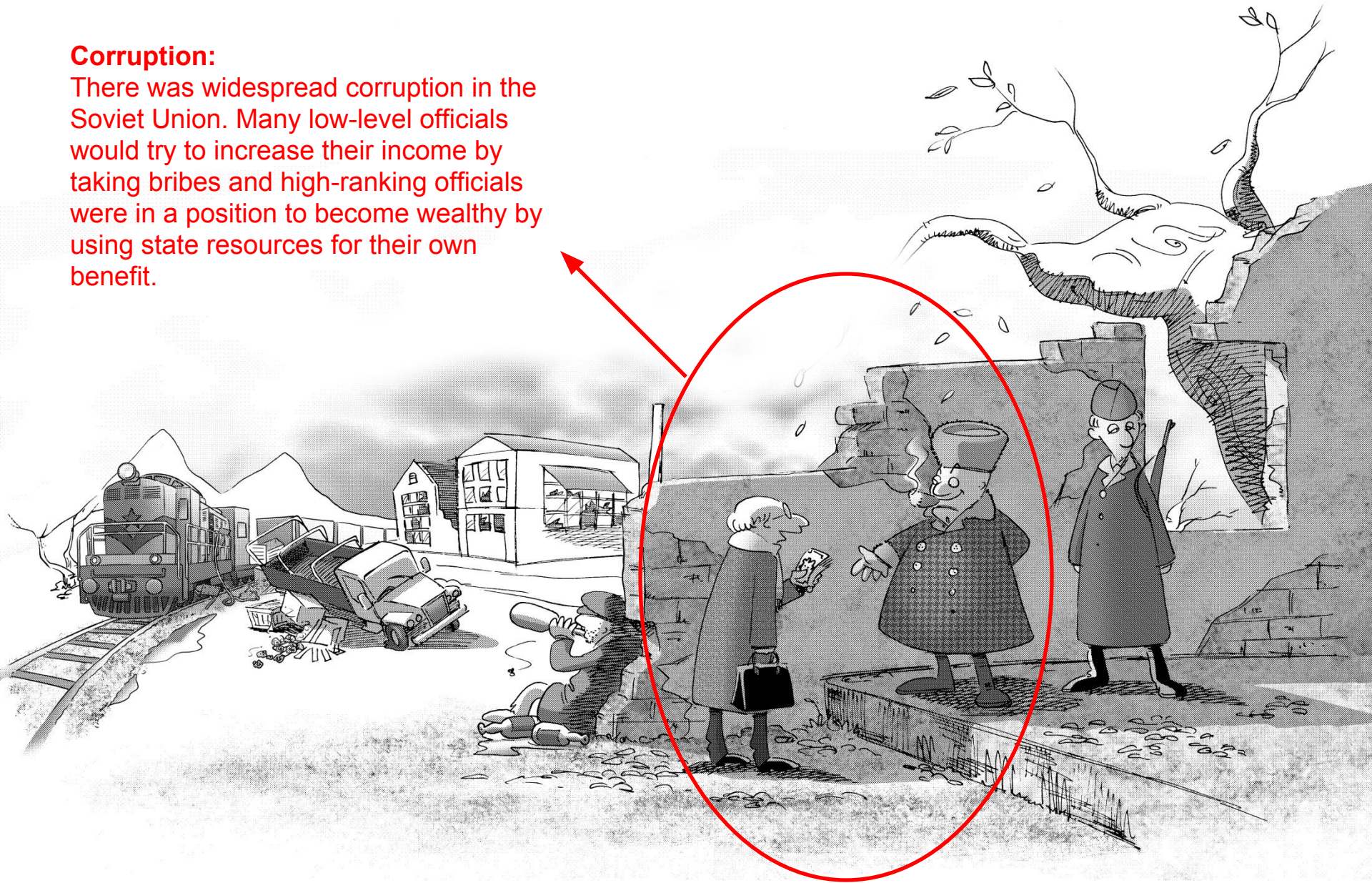
**Alcoholism made workers less efficient:**

Productivity fell because many workers were not doing their jobs properly as a result of drinking too much. Some workers did not even turn up for work because they were too drunk.



### **Corruption:**

There was widespread corruption in the Soviet Union. Many low-level officials would try to increase their income by taking bribes and high-ranking officials were in a position to become wealthy by using state resources for their own benefit.



# Ineffective government

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graph TD; A[Ineffective government] --> B[Not willing to change]; A --> C[Conservative and corrupt leaders]; A --> D[People not interested in improving government];
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## **Not willing to change**

The central government/politburo consisted of many leaders who were not willing to introduce changes. These hardliners saw changes as threats to their positions. As a result efforts to introduce changes to improve the country was opposed.

## **Conservative and corrupt leaders**

The selection of leaders for the politburo was not based on merit. Rather it was based on favouritism and friendship or seniority. Such a system led to corruption and conservatism.

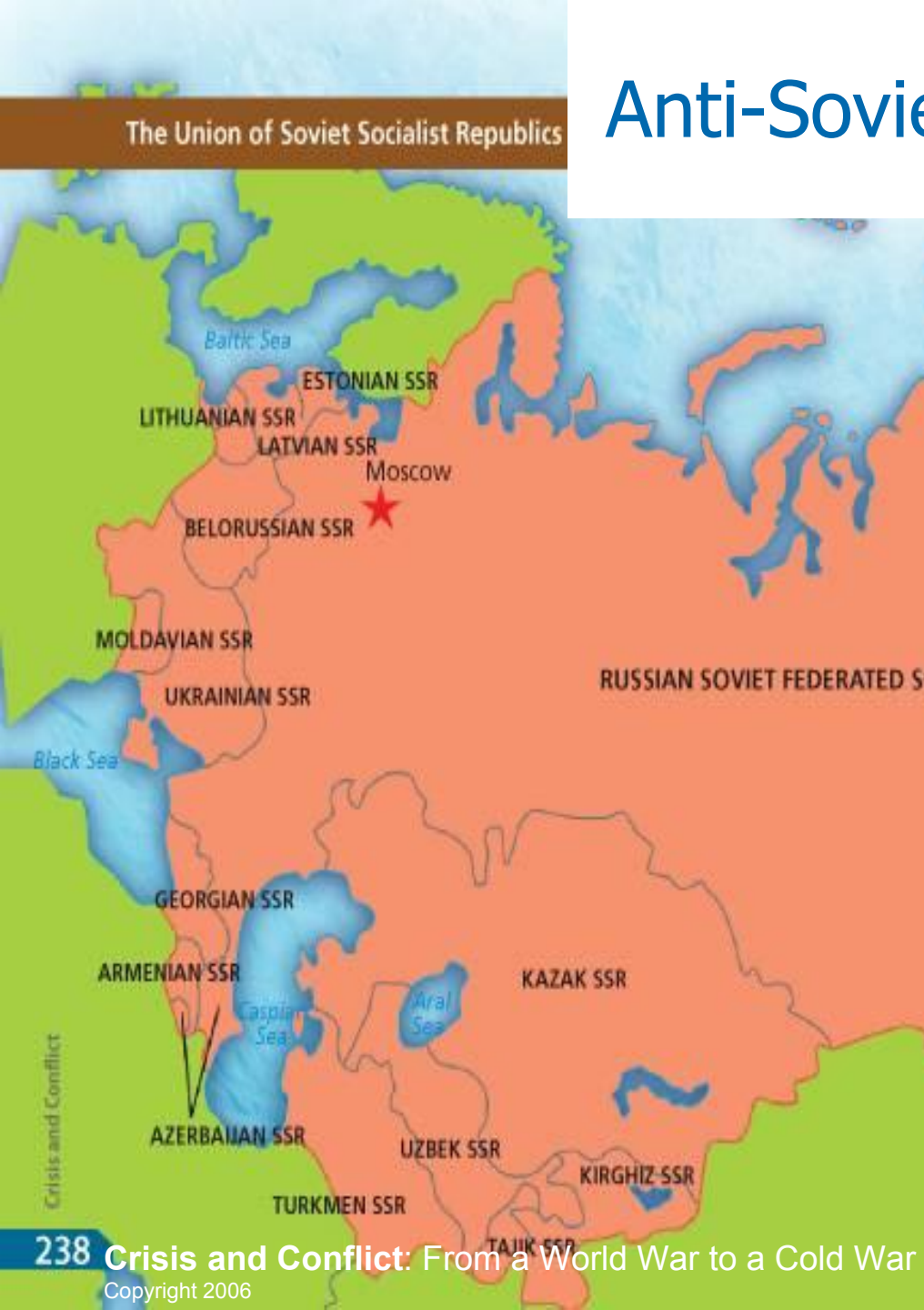
## **People not interested in improving government**

Most felt that they could not do anything to improve the system. Most chose not to be involved in politics. Hence, the government was unable to obtain feedback on its performance.

# Ronald Reagan's 'Star Wars' Programme

- In 1981, US President Reagan began his large-scale spending on arms knowing that the USSR's weak economy would not be able to catch up.
- In 1983, he introduced the creation of the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) or 'Star Wars' programme which could intercept or destroy any Soviet missiles fired at the USA.
- These measures alarmed the USSR who felt the need to improve relations with the USA.

# Anti-Soviet feelings in republics



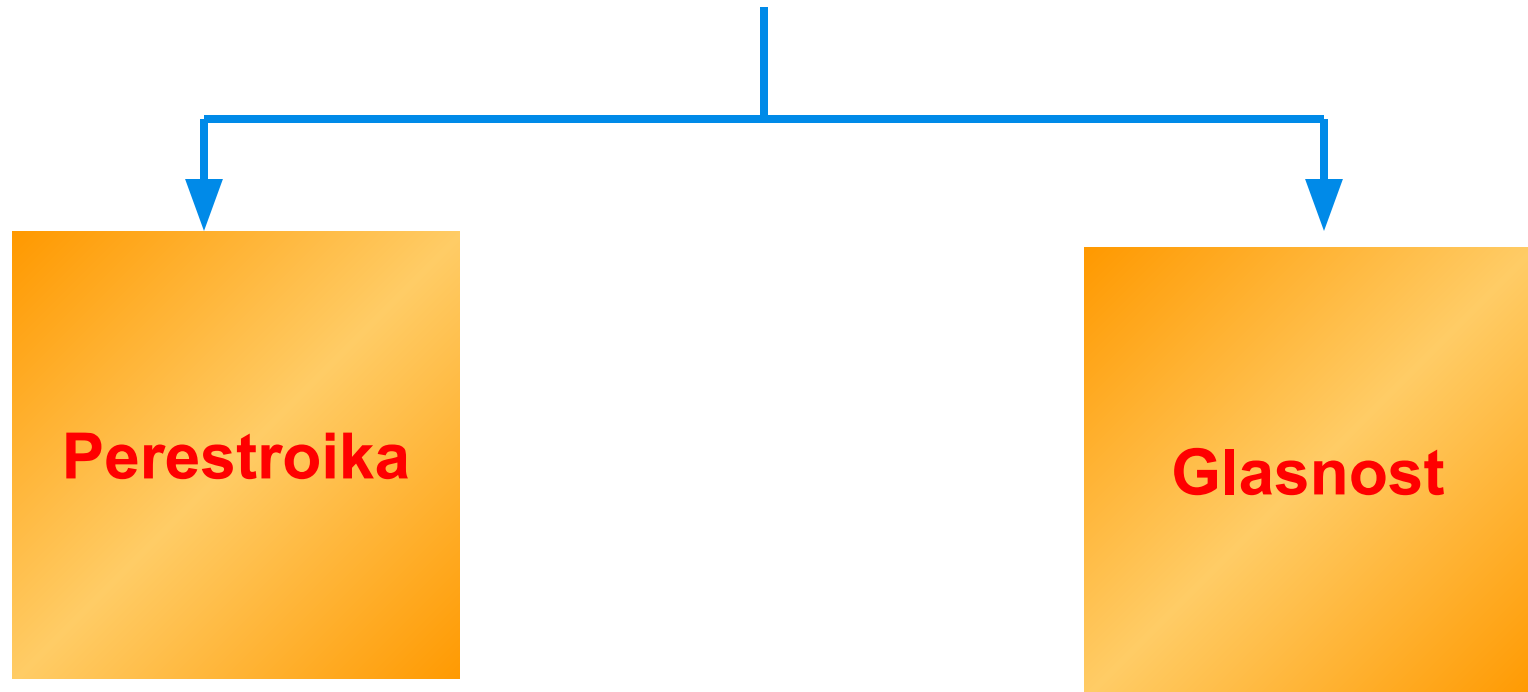
- The USSR comprised of 15 countries that were very different in terms of ethnicity and culture.
- These republics had little in common and were controlled with the use of troops.
- These republics resented Soviet rule.
- Furthermore, governing them cost the Soviet government much resources.

# Increased spending

- As the leader of the Warsaw Pact, the USSR had to spend millions on troops to support its allies.
- Defence spending increased when the USSR invaded Afghanistan in 1979.
- The USSR also provided financial support to Eastern European countries through COMECON.
- All these contributed much to the USSR's debt.

# **How did Gorbachev try to get the Communist system to work again?**

**Gorbachev aimed to change the situation with the introduction the following programmes.**



# Central planning ended (Perestroika)

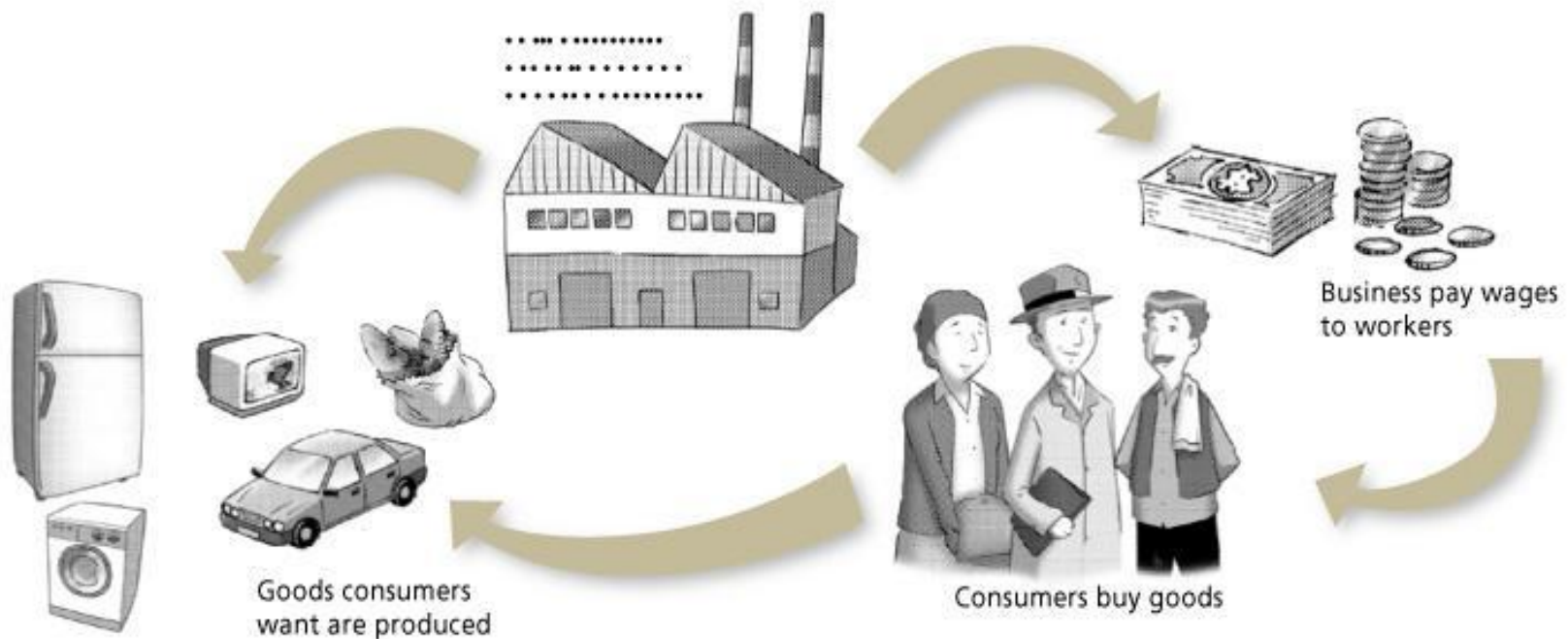
- Gorbachev thought the Soviet Union's problem could be overcome by restructuring the economy. In February 1985 he called for *perestroika*, which is Russian for restructuring or change.
- On 11 June 1987, Gorbachev introduced the Law of State Enterprise.
- Under this law, manager of farms and factories could decide what they wanted to produce and how much they would produce and to make a profit.
- This effectively ended state monopolies.

# Market economy introduced (Perestroika)

- Gorbachev also tried to reduce the role of the Soviet government in the economy by encouraging the setting up of small businesses.
- Foreign companies were also welcomed.
- In doing so he tried to change the Soviet command economy to a 'market economy'.
- This he hoped would ensure a more efficient use of the country's resources.

# In a market economy, the market forces decide:

- What to produce
- How much to produce
- How much to charge



# Military spending reduced (Perestroika)

- Years of arms race had the USSR deeply in debt.
- As part of the plan to improve the Soviet economy, Gorbachev realised the need to reduce spending of arms so that more resources could be put to improve the economy.
- In 1988, he announced that he would remove Soviet troops in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan.
- Following this, he also promised not to interfere in the affairs of Eastern Europe and reduced subsidies (payments from the government) to them.

# Glasnost

Gorbachev knew the conservative approach of the politburo had to change. Realising he needed fresh ideas and suggestions on improving the country, he called for *glasnost* or openness.

## **Open to new ideas**

Through *glasnost*, Gorbachev hoped that ideas and suggestions of ordinary Soviet citizens could help him to change the Communist Party and encouraged it to accept the new ideas.

## **Less censorship**

The media was allowed to report on the problems of the country. Press freedom was allowed. In this way, he hoped to win the people's support for his reforms. For example, atrocities of Stalin were reported in the media.

## **More freedom**

To show his seriousness, Gorbachev put corrupt officials on trial and legalized publications which had been banned previously. Political prisoners were also released.

# **What effect did Gorbachev's changes have on Eastern Europe? (Glasnost)**

- In keeping with *glasnost*, Gorbachev announced that the satellite states should be free to choose their own government.
- In loosening control over these countries, Gorbachev's policy weakened over the Communist governments in these places.
- Hence, Communist regimes in these countries started to collapse.

## **Poland**

1988: Strikes in many parts organized by trade union Solidarity.

Apr 1989: Communist government agreed to hold free elections.

Jun 1989: Solidarity won the elections with leader Lech Walesa elected as President of Poland.

## **East Germany**

Oct 1989: Following Gorbachev's announcement that Soviet troops will not stop demonstrations, protests were held to call for a new government.

Nov 1989: The Berlin Wall was torn down.  
Oct 1990, Germany was reunified.

## **Czechoslovakia**

Nov 1989: Anti-Communist demonstrations began. Communist Party announced it would give up control.

Dec 1989: Dubcek elected as Speaker of Parliament while Havel became President of Czechoslovakia.

1990: First free elections since 1946.

## **Hungary**

1988: Hungary allowed political parties to be formed.

May 1990: Free elections were held which was won by the Democratic Forum.

## **Rumania**

Dec 1989: Rebellion in capital Bucharest. The army joined in later. Rebellion ended with Rumanian Leader Nikolai Ceausescu being shot by firing squad.

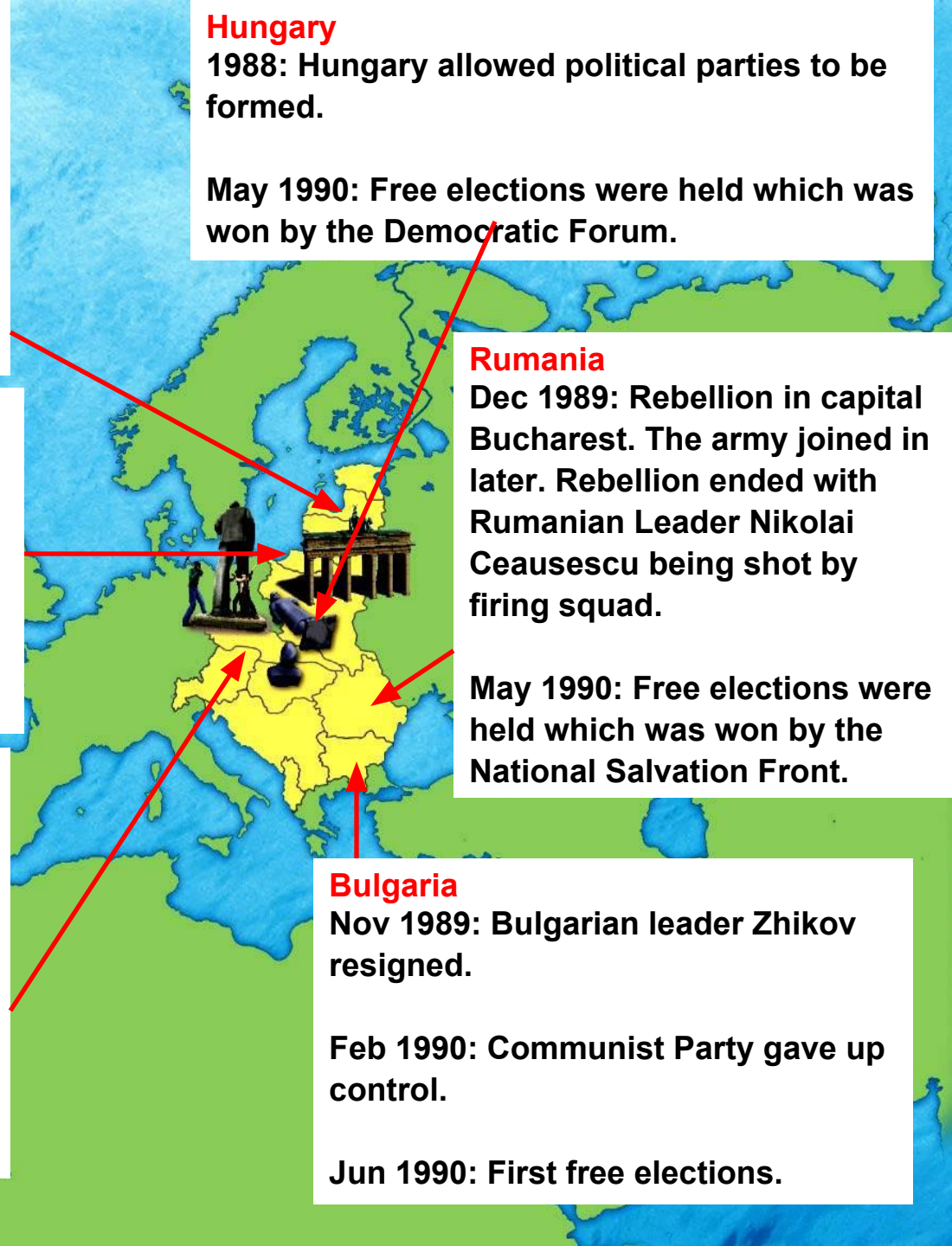
May 1990: Free elections were held which was won by the National Salvation Front.

## **Bulgaria**

Nov 1989: Bulgarian leader Zhikov resigned.

Feb 1990: Communist Party gave up control.

Jun 1990: First free elections.



**Gorbachev's changes  
failed  
to solve problems**

**Immediate cause:  
The 19–21 August  
1991 coup**

**Loss of Communist Party's  
authority**

## **Why did the Soviet Union break up?**

**Rise of nationalism**

**Years of Cold War  
competition**

# Gorbachev's changes failed to solve problems

- Though *perestroika* and *glasnost* raised the hopes of the people, it did not solve their problems.
- Gorbachev faced opposition from Communist leaders.
- Furthermore, it was also difficult to put many of his ideas into practice as it clashed with Communist ideals.
- Many people did not see any improvement in their lives. Some even lost their jobs in their new market economy.
- Many discontented people held demonstrations.

# Loss of Communist Party's authority

- *Glasnost* allowed people to criticise the government policies.
- Changes such as free elections weakened the power of the Communist Party.
- Many lost confidence in the Communist Party.

# **Years of Cold War competition bankrupted the Soviet Union**

- The USSR had long struggled to finance the Cold War competition with the West.
- Soviet technology was not as advanced as the West in the 1970s.
- The USA also tried to weaken the Soviet economy by preventing the sale of computers and other technologies to the USSR.
- The USSR was also forced to spend more than it could due to the 'Star Wars' programme and war in Afghanistan.
- By the time Gorbachev came to power, the USSR was almost financially depleted.

# Rise of nationalism

- With the advent of *glasnost*, the Communist Party had loosened control of the Soviet Union.
- Various ethnic groups from the Soviet republics began openly calling for independence.
- Gorbachev was not willing to let these states leave but the continuing protest made him decide to give them more power.
- A Union Treaty was signed.

# 19–21 August coup

- Fearing that the USSR would break up, hard-liners tried to overthrow Gorbachev on 19 Aug 1991.
- The coup ended in failure and President Boris Yeltsin banned the Communist Party.
- Though it did not succeed, Gorbachev was made to look weak as he failed to control his party.
- He did not have the support of both the Communists and the anti-Communists.
- On 25 Dec 1991, he resigned. The USSR broke up and became the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

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# Summary

