

## CHAPTER 31

### *Western Society and Eastern Europe in the Decades of the Cold War*

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Both western and eastern Europe were devastated by World War II, yet the U.S.S.R. soon emerged as a superpower rivaling the U.S. Eastern Europe was dominated by the Soviets for 45 years after the war, and western Europe generally followed the U.S. model. Only the West, however, showed strong economic recovery in the years following the war. A consumer culture arose, women reached new heights of equality, and democracy was firmly established. In eastern Europe, advances in industrial capability were balanced by repression from the Communist system.

**After World War II: International Setting for the West.** The dislocations of World War II, the arrival of the cold war, and decolonization set a challenging international context for western Europe. Parliamentary democracies gained ground. Parts of Europe united as never before, as some old enemies quickly became fast allies. Rapid economic growth caused changes in society.

**Europe and Its Colonies.** The British, the Dutch, and the French found a hostile climate in their far-flung colonies after World War II. Overall, however, decolonization proceeded more smoothly than it had before the war because Europe's overt power was significantly reduced.

**The Cold War.** The conflict for global hegemony between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. had durable influence on politics and society in both eastern and western Europe and beyond. A U.S.-led coalition of mostly western European nations, NATO, formed to counter perceived Soviet aggression in that continent. The U.S.S.R. countered with an alliance of its own, the Warsaw Pact. The focal point here was Germany, divided into Soviet- and U.S.-influenced parts. In the Middle East and Asia, cold war conflicts arose as well, with war breaking out in Korea and Vietnam.

**The Resurgence of Western Europe.** In contrast to the edge western Europe lost on the international stage was its domestic economic and political development after the war.

**The Spread of Liberal Democracy.** Defeat in war crushed any future that fascism may have had as a political form. New constitutions in several western European nations firmly established constitutional democracies. By the 1980s, western Europe was more politically uniform than at any point in history.

**The Welfare State.** The consolidation of democracy also included a general movement of war decades. Conservatives did not dismantle the welfare state and socialist parties moderated their tone. Power passed from one side to the other without major disruption. Student protests, especially in the United States and France in the 1960s, had impact on governmental policies. By the late 1970s, politics began to swing back toward the right as economic growth slowed.

**New Challenges to Political Stability.** The Western pattern of political compromise around the mechanisms of democracy and the welfare state were jolted by a series of protests that developed in the late 1960s. Campus unrest was a Western-wide phenomenon in the 1960s. At major

American universities, campus unrest focused on the Vietnam War and civil rights. By the early 1970s new rights for students and other reforms, combined with police repression, ended the most intense student protests. The flexibility of postwar Western democracy seemed triumphant. Some additional political concerns, including new feminism and environmentalist movements, entered the arena during the 1970s. And as economic growth slowed and the Western world faced its greatest economic recession since the postwar years, other signs of political change appeared with new leadership in the British Conservative party and the U.S. Republican party.

**The Diplomatic Context.** In the 1950s, a movement began in western Europe that continues to have great import. The European Union, as it is currently known, went through several stages of development. Its initial purpose was to drop tariffs between member nations, but as time passed, it expanded its scope into projecting a single governing body of much of Europe. Nationalist tensions within Europe reached their lowest point in history and the continent enjoyed its longest period of internal peace in history.

**Economic Expansion.** Striking economic growth accompanied political and social change. In the two decades after the war, western Europe's economy boomed. Western civilization became an affluent, consumer-oriented society. By the 1970s, the resurgence had slowed; afterwards, economic advancement occurred, but not as thoroughly.

**In Depth: The United States and Western Europe: Convergence and Complexity.** The U.S.-western Europe relationship has not been constant, but since 1945 the societies have converged in many respects. A shared popular culture stemmed mainly from U.S. innovations but has seen its share of mutual borrowing. The U.S. proved more religious than western Europe, and Europe was franker about sexuality. The biggest difference was in their roles on the world stage, with the U.S. taking the lead in military and diplomatic matters and Europe focusing more inwardly.

**Cold War Allies: The United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.** Similar economic, political, and social trends occurred in the "overseas West" as they had in western Europe and the United States. The U.S. paved the way in foreign policy with the decline of Britain.

**The Former Dominions.** Canada followed the West's lead in providing government health care. At the same time, it cooperated with the U.S. economically for the most part. Canada's most distinctive issue was the separatist movement within the French community in Quebec. After World War II, Australia and New Zealand moved toward alliances around the Pacific, with both nations aiding the U.S. in the Korean War, and Australia, in Vietnam. Asian immigration into Australia was a key social development.

**The "U.S. Century"?** After World War II, the United States assumed the mantle of leadership of democracies and capitalist societies against the Soviet Union. The Truman Doctrine of containment of Communism began in Europe and spread around the globe, to southeast Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa. Less novel were interventions into Latin America. Domestic pressure against the war in Vietnam led to U.S. withdrawal in 1975. By the early 1990s, the U.S. emerged victorious in the cold war and the world's only remaining superpower. As the century closed, the U.S. found itself increasingly involved in flashpoints in the Middle East.

**Culture and Society in the West.** Classic tensions of industrial society declined but gender relations were profoundly altered by new work roles for women. Consumerism gained ground, becoming a defining feature of Western civilization.

**Social Structure.** Social lines were blurred by increasing social mobility. Middle-class people had more leisure opportunities than the working class. Most unskilled labor was done by immigrants. Crime rates increased after the 1940s.

**The Women's Revolution.** A key facet of postwar change involved women and the family. From the early 1950s onward the number of married working women rose steadily in the West. Where women had lacked the vote, they now got it. Gains in higher education were dramatic. Access to divorce and birth control, the latter coming through legal abortion and the Pill, was another major development. Marriage and children came at later ages. Maternal care was widely replaced by day-care centers, as both parents worked. A new wave of feminist political agitation occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. Overall, the family goals established in the Industrial Revolution were less important.

**Western Culture.** One key development was the shift of focus toward the United States. For example, New York replaced Paris as the center of international styles. Europeans contributed, of course, in scientific study, but the cutting edge technological developments often occurred in the U.S. Developments in the arts maintained earlier 20th-century themes. Europeans especially shined in artistic films. Economics became something of an American specialty. Social history became increasingly important.

**A Lively Popular Culture.** Western society displayed more vitality in popular culture than in intellectual life. American television and music were particularly effective agents of that nation's culture (or the perception of it). European music was one area that bucked this trend of "Americanization." In both the U.S. and in Europe, sexual behavior changed among young people, with an increased acceptance of experimentation. As the West's political influence declined around the globe, its cultural influence was at an all-time high.

**Eastern Europe After World War II: A Soviet Empire.** Several major changes in eastern Europe paralleled that of the West, including the impact of industrialization and cold war competition. The Soviet Union sought independence from the world economy and territorial expansion continued.

**The Soviet Union as Superpower.** After World War II, the U.S.S.R. was a superpower that rivaled the United States, and its status was confirmed when it developed atomic weapons. These two nations used diplomacy and military strength to vie for influence in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America.

**The New Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe.** The clearest extension of Soviet power was in eastern Europe, where it pushed farther toward the West than ever before. There, opposition to Soviet rule was crushed, except in Greece, Albania, and Yugoslavia. Mass education and propaganda outlets were established. Industrialization was pushed. A counter to NATO, the Warsaw Pact, was set up. The new system generated obvious tensions. The Berlin Wall was built to keep East Germans from escaping to the West. Attempts to rebel against Soviet oppression were crushed in East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. By the 1980s,

eastern Europe had been vastly changed by Communist rule and cracks were beginning to appear in the Soviet-built masonry.

**Evolution of Domestic Policies.** Within the Soviet Union, Stalinist rule continued, with restriction of travel, media censorship, and isolation from the outside world. Party membership was restricted to a few select dedicated associates.

**Soviet Culture: Promoting New Beliefs and Institutions.** Rapid industrialization created new issues in eastern European society and culture. Freedom of religion was restricted. Important literary currents showed impressive vitality, even as Soviet leaders attacked Western culture and sought alternatives to Western-style consumerism. Beginning in the 1950s, the Stalinist system yielded to more flexibility but Communist party control remained tight. The sciences, especially those useful to the military, were strongly promoted. By the 1970s, new diplomatic and social issues arose.

**Economy and Society.** The Soviet Union lagged in consumer goods because governmental policy favored heavy industry. Living standards improved compared to pre-war conditions but complaints about poor consumer products and long lines remained throughout the Communist era. A great deal of environmental damage occurred because of the drive to produce at all costs. Problems in agricultural production went unsolved as well. Parallels to Western culture included a similar attraction to leisure sports, television, crowded cities, and a dropping birth rate. Soviet propaganda promoted the “equality” of women in the workplace but there were signs that many suffered burdens from demanding jobs and home life.

**De-Stalinization.** After Stalin’s death in the 1950s, Nikita Khrushchev emerged as his successor. Khrushchev triggered a partial thaw of Stalin’s vicious policies and at times seemed to promote cooperation with the West. In fact, however, little real change was made in the Communist institution and after domestic and foreign failures, Khrushchev was ousted by the ruling party. The U.S.S.R. held the lead in the space race with the U.S. until the late 1960s. Relations with Communist China and other nations turned sour. High rates of alcoholism plagued the male workforce. Economic growth fluctuated through the 1980s, by which time the entire system lay on the verge of collapse.

**Global Connections: The Cold War and the World.** Competition between the West and the Soviet alliance dominated many aspects of world history from 1945 to 1992, playing a key role in decolonization and nationalism. Both governmental forms emphasized science, both sold weapons on the world market, both promoted new roles for women.

## **KEY TERMS**

**Eastern Bloc:** Soviet allies in eastern Europe, including Bulgaria, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Hungary.

**Harry Truman:** U.S. president after Franklin Roosevelt in the early years of the cold war. His foreign policy was to contain Communism through diplomacy and military strength.

**Iron Curtain:** Term coined by British P.M. Churchill to describe the political division of Europe between free (western Europe) and repressed (eastern Europe) during the cold war.

**Marshall Plan:** U.S. aid to western Europe after World War II helped it recover and concurrently staved off Communist inroads made in the interim.

**NATO:** North Atlantic Treaty Organization. U.S.-led alliance including western Europe, Canada, and Turkey against Soviet aggression there.

**Warsaw Pact:** Soviet response to NATO.

**Welfare state:** State-run “cradle to grave” care that developed in western Europe and spread in varying forms to the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

**Technocrat:** A type of bureaucrat in this era who often had training in engineering or economics, hired to support the welfare state bureaucracy.

**Green Movement:** Political movement and party that arose in several western European nations in the 1970s that opposed unfettered free market economies and unchecked industrial pollution.

**European Union:** Final name of the Common Market; an economic and, later, political movement in Europe that supported free markets to compete with the U.S. and eventually, the goal of forming a common government in much of Europe.

**New Feminism:** A wave of women’s rights agitation reappeared in the 1960s promoting job opportunities and other civil rights issues for women. Two early leaders were Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan.

**Berlin Wall:** Barrier built by the U.S.S.R. in 1961 in East Germany to keep that nation’s subjects from fleeing to liberty in West Berlin. Major cold war symbol until it was torn down in 1989.

**Solidarity:** Trade union movement in Poland that developed into a political pressure group that supported reforms from the Communist leadership.

**Aleksandr Solzhentsyn:** Soviet writer of anti-Communist expose *The Gulag Archipelago*, who was exiled to the West; he later returned to Russia after the fall of the U.S.S.R.

**Nikita Khrushchev:** Leader of U.S.S.R. after Stalin’s death. Criticized his predecessor’s abuses, signaling a bit of a thaw in the cold war. After backing down in the Cuban Missile Crisis, he was removed from power and exiled within the U.S.S.R.

**Zapatistas:** Guerilla movement named in honor of Emiliano Zapata; originated in 1994 in Mexico’s southern state of Chiapas; government responded with a combination of repression and negotiation.

**Third World:** Also known as developing nations; nations outside the capitalist industrial nations of the first world and the industrialized communist nations of the second world; generally less economically powerful, but with varied economies.