Chapter 25
The International Revolt against Soviet Communism

Chapter Summary

At the close of the twentieth century, the world was transformed by the collapse of communism. In the Soviet Union, Gorbachev’s reforms unleashed a crisis that led to the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. and its reconstitution as the Russian Federation under Yeltsin’s leadership. The new Russia faced economic troubles and separatist threats, especially in Chechnya. In eastern Europe, many countries made the transition peacefully. Poland’s Solidarity movement triumphed at the polls, the Hungarian Communist party took the lead in economic and political reforms, and East and West Germany were reunified. In Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, massive demonstrations forced the government to resign. Other countries, however, were convulsed by violence and the renewed tensions of ethnic, religious, and nationalist differences. The breakup of Yugoslavia led to a war involving “ethnic cleansing” that was only resolved by international intervention. Across central and eastern Europe, the hardships entailed in making the transition to market economies brought a number of former Communist politicians into power, this time by way of elections. However, economies grew throughout the region, and pluralist political systems also flourished.

Chapter Outline

25.115 The Crisis in the Soviet Union
   i. Perestroika
   ii. Glasnost
   iii. Gorbachev’s constitutional reforms
   iv. Limited economic reforms
   v. The party’s grip loosened
   vi. Criticisms of Gorbachev
      a. Gorbachev and the West
         i. Encouraging détente

25.116 The Collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe
   i. Economic stagnation
      a. Poland: The Solidarity Movement
         i. Lech Walesa
ii. Reforms within the party
b. Hungary: Reform into Revolution
   i. Party initiatives
c. The German Democratic Republic: Revolution and Reunification
   i. Flight from Honecker’s rule
   ii. Corruption within the party
   iii. The “German question” revived
d. Czechoslovakia: “’89 is ’68 Upside Down”
   i. A “velvet revolution”
e. Bulgaria’s Palace Revolution, Bloodshed in Romania
   i. The Ceausescu regime
   ii. Ceausescu’s security forces
f. The Revolutions of 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe
   i. Gorbachev’s decisive role

25.117 The Collapse of the Soviet Union
a. The “Creeping Coup d’État”
   i. Uneasiness of reformers
   ii. Yeltsin becomes opposition leader
b. The Failed August Coup
   i. The failed coup
   ii. Yeltsin dissolves the regime
   iii. The U.S.S.R. dissolves
   iv. Gorbachev’s legacy

25.118 After Communism
   i. Triumph of liberalism
   ii. Difficult economic and political transitions
   a. Russia after 1991
      i. Nuclear arms
      ii. Separatist pressures
      iii. Yeltsin’s new constitution
      iv. Yeltsin’s problems
      v. Chechnya invaded
      vi. Putin chosen as successor
      vii. An ambiguous legacy
   b. The Resurgence of Nationalism: The Breakup of Yugoslavia
      i. Political leaders and historical animosities
      ii. Marshal Tito
      iii. Nationalist secessions
      iv. UN and U.S. mediation
      v. Kosovar separatism repressed
vi. The NATO air offensive  
vii. Milosevic ousted  
c. Central and Eastern Europe after 1989  
i. The 1989 revolution assessed  
ii. Confronting the past