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News in Review

December 1999

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The Berlin Wall: Ten Years Later

In October 1990, News in Review examined the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent reunification of East and West Germany. At that time we documented this historic and highly symbolic event and examined its impact not only on German society but on the world community. The events of that time were cause for celebration and signified the hope for a New World Order. Ten years later, another commemorative celebration is occurring. The study of history is in a sense work out of time in that the past, present, and future merge. We profit from hindsight in order to gain a better perspective on the present and predict the future fundamental critical reasoning skills. And now, in context of this updated News in Review story, we have the opportunity to revisit this historic moment and to conduct a further assessment of our reading of history.

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Introduction

The Berlin Wall: Ten Years Later

On November 9, 1989, the most visible and notorious symbol of the Cold War era finally fell. For 28 years, it had run through one of Europe's major cities, splitting it into two hostile zones and preventing anyone from crossing it, on pain of death. During this time, it was literally the concrete embodiment of the hatreds and divisions that existed between the two Germanys and their superpower allies. The Berlin Wall was erected in the summer of 1961 by East Germany's desperate Communist leaders in order to halt the massive hemorrhage to the democratic West of their disaffected citizens. Within months of its construction, it extended north and south out of the city to serve as a barrier that effectively sealed off the border of East Germany, making its people virtually prisoners in their own country.

Since the beginning of the Cold War, Berlin had been a flashpoint of tension and potential armed conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. After the Second World War, these two countries and the other victorious Allied powers, Britain and France, had divided defeated Germany among them. Within a few years, the four zones of occupation had coalesced into two separate states, each closely linked to one of the world's rival superpowers. The Federal Republic of Germany, or West Germany, was formed out of two-thirds of prewar Germany, with its capital at Bonn. During the postwar decades, this country rebuilt and enjoyed an economic boom, assisted by massive U. S. financial aid and investment. Its leaders established a

democratic political system and looked to the United States as its economic benefactor and military protector.

The other third of the country became the German Democratic Republic. It was a close ally of the Soviet Union and adopted a communist economic and political system. Many of its leaders had been prominent members of the German Communist Party and had fought against Adolf Hitler's Nazi dictatorship. But the regime they established with its capital in East Berlin soon became a repressive, one-party state in which dissent was not permitted. In the years after the war, the Soviet Union confiscated much of East Germany's economic resources as compensation for its own horrendous wartime losses. This meant that East Germany's economy, while a miracle by communist East Bloc standards, lagged far behind the West's. These factors led to considerable discontent and unrest among East Berliners, who staged an angry protest against communist rule in 1953.

The city of Berlin had also been divided into four zones in 1945. Although it was located solidly within the territory of East Germany, the western part of the city remained part of West Germany. For East Berliners, it was a relatively simple procedure to flee to the West before the wall went up. But during the summer of 1961, the political standoff and entrenchment of Cold War was increasing, and in Berlin the tension between the two superpowers was almost palpable. Fearful of the continued exodus of East Germans westward and anxious about American troop deployments along the border, the East German Communist Party leader, Walter Ulbricht, ordered the wall to be built, after clearing this momentous decision with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev.

The original barrier was a barbed-wire fence. But within months it had become a massive structure, including two four-metre concrete walls separated by a no-man's land mined with explosives and constantly lit by powerful floodlights. Soldiers of the East German Volkswehr (People's Army) stood guard atop 302 watchtowers and in 20 bunkers, with orders to shoot on sight anyone trying to escape. In the 28 years of the Wall's existence, over 100 people were killed in this way, the last one only months before it finally came down.

For years, the Wall was the most famous symbol of the Cold War and the Iron Curtain that divided the countries of Western and Eastern Europe. For the United States and its allies, the Wall was a propaganda godsend, for it starkly demonstrated the political bankruptcy of communist dictatorships who had to resort to such repressive measures to keep people from fleeing their

countries. Visiting U.S. presidents, from John F. Kennedy to Ronald Reagan, made pilgrimages to the Wall, delivering speeches condemning the East German and Soviet officials who had ordered it built. But as East and West Germany went their separate ways, it appeared unlikely that a dismantling of the Wall or an eradication of the ideological divisions it embodied would soon occur.

However, by 1989 Mikhail Gorbachev had been the leader of the Soviet Union for four years. He had implemented a sweeping reform program in his own country, known as perestroika. Similar kinds of changes were also transforming other Eastern European communist states such as Poland and Hungary. By the fall of that year, a massive citizens protest movement had finally found its voice inside East Germany. Gorbachev had tried to warn that country's stubborn Communist leaders that they had to change before it was too late. When Hungary opened its border, a flood of East German political refugees swept over it, proving that the Communist regime's days there were numbered.

At a hastily convened news conference on the evening of November 9, 1989, East German Communist Party spokesperson Guenther Schabowski made a stunning announcement to the assembled media. He notified them, and the world, that East Germans would henceforth be free to cross the border into the West. Within hours, thousands of deliriously happy East Berliners were flocking through hastily opened holes in the wall, or streaming through checkpoints past bemused border guards. What had seemed unthinkable only months before had finally happened. Berliners were now residents of the same city. The Wall was now history.

Within a year of the Wall's collapse, the division of Germany was also history. East Germany's discredited Communist regime collapsed in ignominy as its citizens eagerly embraced union with the West and the promises of economic prosperity and political freedom it dangled before their eyes. The fall of the Berlin Wall was not the only event that marked the end of the Cold War in that eventful year, but it was surely the most emotionally charged and dramatic. Ten years after these remarkable events, German and world leaders assembled in Berlin to mark the anniversary. But to many former East Germans, the years since reunification with the West have been a period of bitter disappointment. And during the 10 years during which many hoped they would see a New World Order of peace, freedom, and prosperity for the people of a once-divided Europe, more brutal ethnic and political conflicts have occurred, from Bosnia and Kosovo to Chechnya. The 10th anniversary of this profoundly significant event in modern history was cause for

sober and cautious reflection and historical re-assessment, as well as for celebration.

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Images

The Berlin Wall: Ten Years Later

For anyone old enough to remember it, the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, and the end of the Cold War, were moments of great historical significance, and in many ways the ultimate media event. The television coverage the events received was extensive and dramatic. News networks like CNN and CBC Newsworld had only recently begun broadcasting at that time, and their reporters delivered a constant barrage of commentary and analysis as the drama unfolded in Berlin and quickly spread to other parts of Eastern Europe, including Czechoslovakia and Romania, before the year was out. People knew that they were watching history in the making and they were aware of the fact that the world was undergoing a fundamental transformation as the Cold War came to an end.

Being There: October 1990

In News in Review's first year of production we too documented this historic moment. Locate and watch *German Reunification* in the October 1990 issue. Suggest how this report provides a visual celebration of a great moment in time. Identify visual symbols, visual metaphors, and historic gestures that allow us to see clearly into the past.

Re-Assessment: December 1999

In the 10 years since the fall of the Wall, a new generation of people too young to be aware of its importance at the time has come to maturity. For high school students today, the Cold War

is now a period of recent history, sometimes only dimly recalled and understood. The world has seen many conflicts and upheavals in the decade since then, and a mood of disillusionment and even cynicism has long replaced the sense of idealism and hope that motivated many who cheered the fall of the Wall in 1989.

As you watch this 1999 return visit to the Berlin Wall, note and explain the following:

1. How does this report capture some of the excitement and drama that so many people in Germany and around the world felt at the time the events depicted in it actually took place? How do these events appear to you from the perspective of 1999?
2. What background information does this report provide that one needs in order to understand the Berlin Wall in the context of the Cold War, and to comprehend what its fall and the subsequent reunification of Germany has meant to that country and the world in the intervening years? How does the background that the events of 1989 represent help us understand Europe and the world community in 1999?
3. What images, symbols, visual metaphors, words, and phrases in both reports have remained constant and timeless over this 10-year period?

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Enhanced Viewing

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History is dramatic. History is the theatre of human events. Like theatre, history is replete with meaningful and evocative images. Imagery is the effective use of real images to illustrate and to suggest mental images that heighten the viewer's understanding of the significance of events. Watch this report again. This time note carefully the elements suggested below and be prepared to explain their impact on the viewer.

Images of Berlin today, in 1989, and at the end of the Second World War

Scenes of people celebrating in 1989 and 1999

Images of the Wall during the years of its existence and images of the empty fields today where the Wall once stood

Scenes of former East Germans returning to the place where the Wall once stood between them and their western compatriots

Scenes of abandoned factories and other evidence of economic problems in eastern Germany today

Images of famous sites and monuments in Berlin such as Potsdamer Platz, the Brandenburg Gate, and the Reichstag building

Scenes of the laying of the double row of cobblestones to trace the line along which the Wall was built

Recording For Posterity

History is not forgetting. History is the preservation of accurate information for future generations. Record answers to the following questions with the help of the video.

1. Into how many sectors was Berlin divided at the end of the Second World War? Which countries controlled them?
2. What two states emerged in Germany by the 1950s?
3. How many people left East Germany in the first eight months of 1961?
4. When was the Berlin Wall built? Why was it built?
5. When did the Berlin Wall fall? Why did it fall?
6. What evidence of an economic boom can be seen in Berlin today? What evidence of economic problems can also be seen?
7. Why are many residents of eastern Germany unhappy with their situation 10 years after reunification with the West? Why are many residents of western Germany unhappy with their eastern fellow-citizens 10 years after reunification?
8. What is the importance of each of the following places in Berlin: (a) Church of Gethsemane; (b) Brandenburg Gate; (c) Potsdamer Platz; (d) Reichstag?

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Historical Re-Assessment

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History is perspective. As time passes, we are able not only to gather more information about past events but also to gain a greater understanding because time has made our vision broader. Consider the answers to the questions on the preceding page of this resource guide and respond to the supplementary assessment questions.

1. Berlin was divided into four sectors under the command of the U.S., Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. In current political terms, what are the relationships between these nations?

2. The Federal Republic of Germany (West) and the German Democratic Republic (East). Comment on the significance of these names from the point of view of 1999.

3. In the first eight months of 1961, 160 000 people left East Germany. Suggest the impact this would have had on the reunified Germany.

4. The Wall was built in August 1961 to halt the exodus of East Germans unhappy with the Communist regime to the West. How has history revealed the impact of the Wall on world events?

5. The Wall fell in November of 1989 because the East German Communist Party realized it could no longer control the popular movement demonstrating against it, and that it could not expect

any assistance from the Soviet Union if it tried to do so. In what ways have subsequent events in Europe perpetuated this fall ?

6. Construction of new buildings is taking place at a rapid rate in Berlin today, symbolizing the German government's determination to make its new capital a modern and prosperous city. Many residents of eastern Germany are suffering severe economic hardship as factories from the Communist era have closed down. Officially, unemployment is 18 per cent, but many believe it to be over 30 per cent. For those who have jobs, the wages and salaries they are paid lag far behind those earned by workers in the West. Could these economic conditions have been predicted?

7. Many eastern Germans are disillusioned and unhappy 10 years after their reunification with the West. Their economic situation is inferior to that of the West and they believe that the westerners show a condescending and arrogant attitude toward them. Many western Germans are angry at their eastern compatriots because they think they complain too much, do not want to work, and are ungrateful for the economic assistance that has been given to them in the years since reunification. How does this suggest the fragile nature of dreams and the ongoing nature of self-determination?

8. The Church of Gethsemane was the focal point for meetings of the opposition political movement in East Germany that played a major role in bringing down the Communist regime there in 1989. The Brandenburg Gate once marked the border between East and West Berlin, and is now an important symbol of a reunified Germany. Potsdamer Platz was a poisoned field lying between East and West Berlin. Now it is the centre of the city's massive rebuilding campaign, and many corporations are constructing office towers there. The Reichstag is the German parliament building, burned down shortly after Adolf Hitler took power in 1933, gutted during the final battles of the Second World War, abandoned in the Cold War years, and recently restored and reopened as the meeting place of the German Bundestag (parliament) now that Berlin is the capital of a reunited Germany once again. Why are symbols important in history?

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Some might say that in order to understand history, You had to be there. They might also say, You had to live through it. This is why oral histories, first-hand accounts, are also very important when assessing the events of the past. While reading the following material, think about how it sheds the light of reality on the events in Germany 10 years ago.

Ilona and Andreas Steiner are a Berlin couple whose lives have been turned upside down during the 10 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. In October 1989, less than a month before this dramatic event, the Steiners had been chosen by the East German Communist government to speak to the visiting world media on the 40th anniversary of the regime s founding. At that time, the Steiners were loyal to their government, and believed that the socialist system it was trying to create was a more just and humane alternative to the rampant capitalism they saw existing on the other side of the Wall in the West.

The Steiners were lawyers then, and still practise law today in Berlin. But everything in their lives has changed dramatically in the years since the Wende (turn) in their country s direction occurred. On the positive side, they both were able to find employment in their chosen profession, after studying and writing examinations on the West German law code, which now applies to the entire country. This is in stark contrast to many former East German citizens who have had to confront unemployment

and economic hardship in the wake of communism's collapse. But even though the Steiners are much more fortunate than many eastern Germans, they still have very mixed feelings about what has happened to their lives and their homeland during the past tumultuous decade.

For instance, instead of feeding the neighbourhood cats as she once did, Ilona Steiner now puts out food and other supplies for its burgeoning homeless population, something that was unheard of in East Germany. She and her husband also find that even though their legal practice is much more up-to-date in its technology than their former one, the sense of joy and collective participation in work they once experienced has all but vanished. On the positive side, however, they are now free to travel to places in Western Europe that were once forbidden to them. Their daughter has just returned from spending a year of her high-school studies in the United States. A world that was once very secure and certain, but at the same time restrictive and narrow, has vanished for them. It has been replaced by one that is much more open to exploration, but also carries with it considerable difficulties and insecurities.

The Steiners still live in the same four-room apartment, but instead of a coal-fired stove they now have central gas heating. They have also purchased a number of appliances including a compact-disc player that would have been practically unobtainable in East Germany. But their monthly rent, which used to be the equivalent of \$50 (CDN) per month, has now skyrocketed to over \$900. They used to drive one of the old Trabant cars whose poor quality and design made them a standing joke in East Germany. Now they own a new Opel, which they recently drove to Paris.

To an outside observer, it would seem that the Steiners' lives have improved since the fall of communism. But they are not so sure of this. Their feelings about the regime they once so wholeheartedly supported are ambivalent. On the one hand, they are highly critical of the shootings of people attempting to flee to the West, for which they can see no possible justification. They are also bitter about the lies that the regime told its citizens to cover up such actions and excuse its other social and economic failings. But at the same time, they miss the sense of security that the extensive social welfare and educational systems provided by communism gave them, and the feeling of solidarity they used to feel when they participated in events such as May Day.

During the years that communism ruled Eastern Europe, the Western media would frequently claim that the huge crowds

present on such occasions were composed of people who were obliged to attend. According to Andreas Steiner, this is not true. He claims that despite restrictions on political freedom and economic difficulties, many people in East Germany still held at least some loyalty to the regime. Although they wanted it to change radically in the fall of 1989 in a more democratic direction, they did not want to move quickly to embrace the capitalist model of society that prevailed in the West. But whatever the sentiments of East Germans, this is exactly what happened with reunification in 1990.

A decade after, the Steiners looked out from their apartment window on the fireworks marking the fall of the Wall exploding over the Brandenburg Gate. Unlike many Berliners, they stayed home that night, seeing no real cause for celebration. As Andreas Steiner noted, It meant nothing to me. I saw the fireworks on the news, but it would have never occurred to me to go. . . . And there is no reason to celebrate now. We've still got a long way to go.

Discussion

1. What do you think the Steiners have gained and what they have lost as a result of the reunification of Germany? Do you think their gains outweigh their losses, or vice versa? Give reasons for your opinion.
2. In what ways are the Steiners a typical eastern German family? In what ways are they atypical? Why do you think they feel so ambivalent about the reunification of Germany 10 years after the fall of the Wall?
3. What do you think Andreas Steiner has in mind when he says We've still got a long way to go?

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Like a pebble thrown into a pond, the anniversary of a historical event creates ever-widening circles of memory and study. Starting figuratively from the Berlin Wall, our assessment of a single major event the fall must inevitably include an examination of a much wider context. As you read the following timeline, highlight details that you find particularly relevant in terms of the eventual historic event of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

May 1945 The Second World War ends as Soviet forces enter a shattered Berlin and Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler commits suicide in his underground bunker. Even though the Russians capture Berlin alone, at the cost of over 100 000 lives, they agree to divide the conquered city into four Allied zones of occupation: French, British, American, and Russian.

June 1948 May 1949 As the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States escalates, Berlin becomes a potential flashpoint for superpower conflict. By this time, the three Western Allies have created the Federal Republic of Germany from their zones of occupation, while the Soviet Union is in the process of establishing the pro-communist German Democratic Republic in the east. West Berlin lies completely within East German territory and depends on a single highway for its supplies. When the Soviets cut this link, British and American airplanes fly in a continuous airlift of goods. This is known as the Berlin Airlift.

1952 Alarmed at the massive exodus of its citizens, the East German Communist government seals its borders with the West, except for Berlin, which remains open.

June 1953 A wave of protest against communist rule sweeps across East Germany. In Berlin, demonstrators are crushed by East German and Soviet troops. At least 40 are killed. This is the first in a series of anti-government protests to occur in the Soviet-dominated bloc of Eastern European communist countries.

August 1961 As the Cold War heats up, Berlin becomes the focal point for a potential clash between the Soviet Union and the United States. East German authorities authorize the sealing of Berlin's borders with the West, and begin construction of the Wall. From a simple barbed-wire fence, it soon becomes an elaborate network of walls and barriers, patrolled by heavily armed police and soldiers with dogs. It is designed to halt any escape attempts by disaffected East Germans. Nonetheless, many do try to flee in subsequent years. Some succeed, but others pay with their lives or are captured and jailed for treason.

June 1963 U.S. President John F. Kennedy visits the Wall and makes an emotional speech to a huge West Berlin crowd, vowing to defend the city from Soviet threats.

May 1973 As Cold War tensions subside, an era of détente opens up between Western and Eastern Europe. West German Chancellor (prime minister) and former West Berlin mayor Willy Brandt visits the East, and diplomatic relations between the two countries are established for the first time.

May September 1989 In the midst of a major democratic reform, Hungary announces that it is opening its border with Austria. This allows East Germans to flee en masse, taking refuge in West German embassies in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. On September 10, Hungary no longer checks East Germans for exit visas. Within three days, 15 000 East Germans leave for the West via Hungary.

September October 1989 A pro-democracy citizens' movement emerges in Leipzig, East Germany, and quickly spreads to other parts of the country. Its members hold weekly peaceful demonstrations that grow larger in numbers despite police repression. The regime holds its 40th anniversary celebrations in a surreal atmosphere as opposition to it grows. Visiting Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev warns East German Communist party

chairman Erich Honecker that his regime must reform or face massive popular resistance. Honecker ignores Gorbachev's advice, but it is clear to East German opposition forces that the Soviets will not come to the aid of the regime, as they previously did.

November 4, 1989 A massive anti-government protest in East Berlin attracts over a million people. Honecker is replaced as Communist party leader by Egon Krenz, who promises gradual reforms.

November 9, 1989 A Communist party spokesperson announces that the border between East and West Berlin is to be opened the next day. When Berliners hear the news, they rush to the Wall where a massive instant party soon begins. People with sledgehammers and concrete saws begin work demolishing sections of the hated Wall. Others flock through the checkpoints that bewildered border guards have opened. East and West Berliners meet and begin a celebration that lasts for days.

December 1989 The East German Communist Party chooses a new leader, Hans Modrow, who is authorized to begin reunification talks with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

February 1990 The four Allied powers who once occupied Berlin all agree to permit the reunification of Germany and its membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. For Soviet leader Gorbachev, this is a complete reversal of his government's policy since the end of the Second World War. He announces that all Russian troops will be withdrawn from eastern Germany.

March 18, 1990 Elections are held throughout eastern and western Germany to approve reunification and choose a new government. Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrats win a majority, followed by the Social Democrats. In eastern Germany, the old Communists reorganize themselves as the Party of Democratic Socialism and win a few seats.

October 3, 1990 Less than a year after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany is officially reunited.

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The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 was probably the most dramatic single episode in the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, leading to the end of the Cold War. At the time, it was almost universally celebrated as a development that would usher in a New World Order of international peace and security, coupled with enhanced freedom and democracy. To the leaders of the United States and the Western alliance, it appeared to be a vindication of their long anti-communist struggle, and a clear demonstration of the superiority of both democracy and capitalism. It marked the beginning of a decade in which the glories of the free market and political pluralism have been championed around the world as the twin tickets to economic progress and democratic development.

But 10 years after the fall of communism, there are many who wonder whether the post-Cold-War New World Order has really fulfilled its promise. Former East Germans are bitter and resentful because they have not seen many tangible economic benefits from embracing capitalism. Throughout the countries of the former Soviet bloc, large numbers of people look back on the communist era with a sense of nostalgia for the security and order it once provided, where now they face upheaval and hardship. In the West, economic globalization continues to be touted as a universal solution by political and business leaders who argue that with the end of the Cold War there is now no other alternative to free-market democracy available to the

countries of the world. While a few persistent hold-outs like Cuba defy this trend, even nominally communist countries like China and Vietnam are promoting privatization and foreign investment in their rapidly expanding economies.

The end of the Cold War was also heralded as marking an end of ideology, or even the end of history. With the collapse of communism, it was argued, there was now only one logical path for the world to follow a liberal-democratic political system linked inexorably to a capitalist economy dominated by the private sector. Neo-conservative writers and political leaders persistently pressed their point that the fall of communism meant not just the discrediting of that ideology but the calling into question of any vision of a different kind of world. For their part, socialist or left-wing thinkers were hard pressed to respond to these events, and develop what they would see as a new, more humane and democratic alternative to unfettered global capitalism.

Polarized Points of View

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the consequences of the fall have been debated by many journalists, academics, political observers, politicians, and ordinary citizens. As is often the case when enormous political events occur events that are representative of or the culmination of many years of history it is normal to want to find definitive answers and explanations. We may choose to accept the validity of a particular interpretation of events, but as students of history we are also obliged to examine the reasoning and the rationale behind the interpretation. Points of view regarding the historical struggle between capitalism and communism, in many ways diametrically opposed political ideologies, can become polarized and divided, reflecting the inherent opposition of the two systems.

Two principal points of view interpreting the fall of the Wall in terms of what it means are those outlined below. Below you will find two passages. Each is written as an apology in the original Greek and Latin sense of the word, that is, an explanation and defence of a point of view. As you read these apologies, make notes that help you identify and understand how the same events can be seen in quite different ways.

1. A Caveat

The fall of the Berlin Wall is a good opportunity to remember to beware of political projects that promise a perfect world. How did communism survive for so long in the countries it once ruled? Communism was a utopian ideal and movement whose project was the total transformation of society. It was not a question of

reforming society; this is why it was so dangerous. Communist leaders believed whole-heartedly in their utopian vision of a perfect society and would utilize any means, however ruthless, in order to achieve it. They were entirely prepared to sacrifice entire generations of people to their goal of a society of equality, brotherhood, and international peace.

The ideal vision that was fundamental to the European Enlightenment, that humanity can be perfected, is also linked to the Communist ideal that people are not born bad but are the products of imperfections in their societies. Like Karl Marx, the founder of communism, who never lived to see his theory put into practice, communists perceive the major problem being the domination of the poor by the rich and the consequent economic inequalities. If these could be removed, they believe, then the major source of evil in the world would disappear.

But once communist leaders like Lenin in Russia or Mao Zedong in China took power, they imposed brutal dictatorships on their people. Their propaganda justified these actions by claiming that they and the parties they led were ruling in the name of the people. Of course, since they did not permit free elections, and the communist party was the only legal political organization, it was never possible to know whether or not this claim was true.

When communism finally collapsed 10 years ago, it was clear that it was more destructive even than fascism, the 20th century's other destructive totalitarian ideology. It was in existence five times as long as Nazism, and the countless millions of victims of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin and his Chinese counterpart Mao surpassed Hitler's genocide in the death camps considerably.

What can we learn from the failure of communism and from its terrible record? It is clear that any state-run economy is a recipe for oppression and poverty. Private property is fundamental to liberty. Without economic freedom, there can be no real political freedom. Second, we must be very wary of utopian solutions to complex problems. Societies are too complicated to be transformed according to an inflexible master blueprint for social and economic change. Simplistic formulas for the perfect society and political theories that predict how social change will occur fascinate us, but we must recognize that they are in large part fantasies.

Since its demise, no rival ideology has replaced communism in the world. The free markets and democratic pluralism of truly open societies have won the day. We must also recognize, however, that people still search for the single, all-inclusive plan that provides a rationale for the world and a fool-proof recipe for

perfect social change. Social perfection cannot be achieved; it is an ideal on which we base our pragmatic economic systems, our common sense. Communism lacks this kind of common sense, is self-defeating, and consequently fatal.

2. A Dubious Victory

It was clear that on the 10th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Western leaders thought they had won. And the implied statement of many of them was that now Communists would understand the error of their ways. However, it is those who view this event as marking the total collapse of communism or of any other utopian ideology who must justify that a victory has occurred.

Communism as articulated by Karl Marx was certainly a grand theory whose goal was economic, social, and political change. But to the millions of people who were attracted to it in this century, it was not the ideology and the ideas that won them over, it was instead a reaction to their own desperate conditions. The Russian Revolution was born in the wake of the carnage of the First World War. Communism also gained strength during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when capitalism seemed to have failed, and after the Second World War because of its opposition to Hitler's Nazi regime.

To impoverished workers and peasants in different parts of the world, communism presented itself as an alternative to a system that exploited and dehumanized them. Although it is highly unlikely that many of them could read and comprehend Marx's writings, they obviously knew that they were oppressed, and therefore they took action to end their oppression. The results of this were the great historical upheavals we call the Russian, Chinese, Cuban, and Vietnamese revolutions, to name only the major ones.

Traditional conservatives like to argue that the fatal flaw of communism or any other blueprint for social change is that it takes no account of the complexity and unpredictability of human beings and societies. For this reason, they think, radical change is dangerous, and even an unsatisfactory status quo is preferable to any untried alternative. Most of the time, workers have tended to accept this view, not wanting to rock the boat for fear that those who hold power will use it against them. If millions of them were won over to communism despite these fears and hesitations, then it simply proves that the conditions they faced were so intolerable that anything must be better. As Marx himself put it at the end of the Communist Manifesto, Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!

Those who claim that the end of the Cold War proves the superiority of free markets over socialism are revealing their own presumptuousness. Capitalism is not always a recipe for prosperity as many people who have been on the receiving end of globalization all over the world can attest. Ever since its inception, capitalism has required state intervention or at least regulation to keep it from destroying itself. The irony of today's neo-conservative champions of free-market democracy is that in their haste to proclaim the end of ideology they fail to recognize their own position for what it truly is another ideology. It runs the same risks as communism did of claiming to hold all the answers to the world's problems. In many respects, it is the mirror image of the very ideology it so strongly condemns, and it demonstrates the same arrogance.

Discussion and Activities

1. Working in small groups, read the passages on the previous two pages aloud. You may wish to actually do a dramatic reading as if you were an important public figure giving a speech. Then, as a group, prepare a summary in your own words of the main points each apologist presents. Use a dictionary to look up the meanings of any unfamiliar words. Present your summaries to your classmates for further discussion. Which case do you think was presented more effectively? Why do you think so?
2. What are the major criticisms of communism as a theory and as a way of organizing society? What lessons does the first passage suggest we should learn from the fall of the Berlin Wall?
3. Why does the second author think that communism was an appealing alternative to millions of people in the past century? What criticisms of the now-dominant free-market democracy viewpoint in our society are either overtly made or implied?
4. Write your own apology in a formal style on the meaning of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Try to incorporate a particular style in your piece, a style that aims to convince the reader of the validity of the arguments presented. Post your work and compare the points of view expressed in the class.
5. Search recent issues of magazines and newspapers for editorials and opinion pieces on the meaning of the fall of the Berlin Wall published on the anniversary of the event. Choose one or more people to post the material you have located and to arrange them according to content from left to right. Articles most condemning of communism should be on the far right and those

most understanding of the historical period represented by communism should be to the left. More neutral articles should be in the middle. Examine the display, reading the articles. Discuss whether they have been arranged appropriately according to the point of view expressed.

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10th

News in Review

December 1999

Discussion, Research, and Essay Questions

The Berlin Wall: Ten Years Later

1. Using an atlas and an almanac or encyclopedia, prepare a storyboard on the Federal Republic of Germany and its capital city, Berlin. Photocopy pictures of famous buildings and historical sites in the city. In chart form, summarize significant and relevant information about Germany in the following categories: (a) geography; (b) people (c) government (d) economy (e) finance and trade (f) transportation and communications. Information on Germany can also be obtained from the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, 1 Waverley St., Ottawa ON K2P OT8, Tel: (613) 232-1101 Fax: (613) 594-0330.

2. Using an encyclopedia, prepare and present a brief report on the roles of the following world leaders in the Cold War period of history from 1945 to 1991, and how their actions affected Berlin: Joseph Stalin, Harry S. Truman, Konrad Adenauer, Nikita S. Khrushchev, Walter Ulbricht, Erich Honecker, John F. Kennedy, Willy Brandt, Ronald Reagan, Helmut Kohl, Mikhail Gorbachev, George Bush.

3. Find out more about the history of Berlin from its founding in medieval times to its rise to prominence as Germany's capital city. The book *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin* by Alexandra Ritchie contains a great deal of interesting information on the different periods of the city's history up to the present day.

4. Between 1989 and 1991 communist regimes fell throughout

Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union itself. Compare and contrast the experiences of some of the following countries during this dramatic period and in the years since then: East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania, USSR. How successful have these countries been in transforming their economic, social, and political systems in the post-communist era? The News in Review index of programs at the end of this resource guide may be of help to you in your research.

5. Access the CBC Web site (www.cbc.ca) to find the full script of Don Murray's report, *The Ghost of the Wall*. Read the full texts of the interviews with a number of Berliners who share their views with him on what reunification has meant for them, their city, and their newly unified country. Why do you think so many of them have mixed feelings about the events that have occurred since the Wall came down in 1989?

6. Read and prepare a book review on one of the following books dealing with the Berlin Wall and its historical importance: *The Berlin Wall: Representations and Perspectives*; *The Last Division: A History of Berlin 1945-89*, by Ann Tusa; *Testimony of the 20th Century: Before and After the Berlin Wall*, by Marie Ueda; *The House at the Bridge*, by Katie Hafner; *Berlin Journal: 1989-90*, by Robert Darnton; *The Berlin Wall*, by Houghton-Mifflin Co. staff; *The Berlin Wall: How it Rose and Why it Fell*, by Doris Epler; *The Berlin Wall*, by Lisa Mirable; and *Up Against It: Photos of the Berlin Wall*, by L. Rice.

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