“Tear Down This Wall” a speech by Ronald Reagan

On June 12, 1987, President Ronald Reagan spoke in West Berlin, near the border with East Berlin. His speech put significant pressure on the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev. While Gorbachev was making some economic and political reforms in the Soviet Union, Reagan believed that Gorbachev needed to do more. In this speech, Reagan issues a challenge to Gorbachev that most believe helped start then end of the Cold War.

In the 1950s, Khrushchev predicted: “We will bury you.” But in the West today, we see a free world that has achieved a level of prosperity and well-being unprecedented in all human history. In the Communist world, we see failure, technological backwardness, declining standards of health; even want of the most basic kind – too little food. Even today, the Soviet Union still cannot feed itself. After these four decades, then, there stands before the entire world one great and inescapable conclusion: freedom leads to prosperity. Freedom replaces the ancient hatreds among the nations with comity and peace. Freedom is the victor.

And now the Soviets themselves, may, in a limited way, be coming to understand the importance of freedom. We hear much from Moscow about a new policy of reform and openness. Some political prisoners have been released. Certain foreign news broadcasts are no longer being jammed. Some economic enterprises have been permitted to operate with greater freedom from state control.

Are these the beginnings of profound change in the Soviet Union? Or are they token gestures, used to raise false hopes in the West, or to strengthen the Soviet system without changing it? We welcome change and openness; for we believe that freedom and security go together, that the advance of human liberty can only strengthen the cause of world peace. There is one sign the Soviet Union can make that would be unmistakable, that would advance dramatically the cause of freedom and peace.

General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev...tear down this wall!

1. Reagan says “freedom is the victor.” Is that fact or opinion? Give evidence to back yourself up.

2. Do you think Reagan’s words were appropriate or was he putting Gorbachev in a difficult situation? In other words, was Reagan helping or hurting the end of the Cold War? Why?

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1 The democratic nations of Western Europe and the united States
2 Never having happened before
3 courtesy