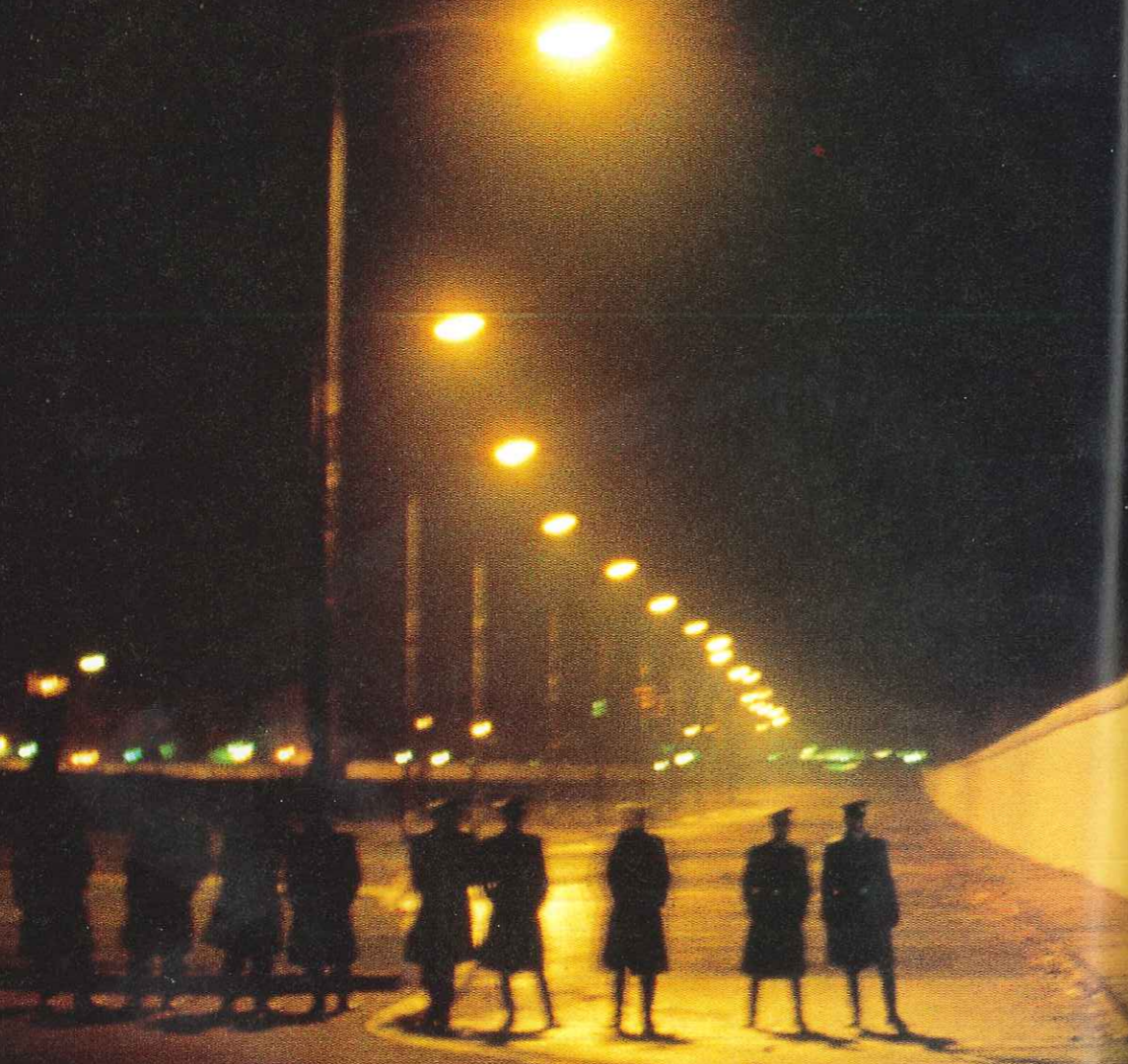


# Berlin, 1989

*The night of 9/10 November.  
East Germany's frontier to the  
West, just before it opened. The  
Wall had divided Germany,  
and the world. Now, everything  
was to change.*



This was too little too late to satisfy the sweeping demand for reform. The more conciliatory Krenz appeared to be, the greater was the call for radical change. At the end of October, 300,000 demonstrators in Leipzig and Dresden called for the removal of the Communist regime. Krenz fired his entire cabinet and two-thirds of the Politburo. The border with Czechoslovakia was reopened. Still this was not enough. Krenz called Gorbachev in the Kremlin to ask for advice. Gorbachev suggested that opening the borders would “let off steam” and avoid “an explosion.”

On Saturday, 4 November, half a million people jammed East Berlin’s streets to hear a concert carried live on East German and West German tele-



People power. Demonstrations in East Berlin at the Wall and in the centre of the city. One more puff and we’ll blow the Wall down!



vision. The whole event was intended to rally support for reform while preserving the socialist system. But the protesters had by now grown brave. One by one, poets, musicians, and writers recited or sang satires about East Germany and its failings and demanded full democracy. Stefan Heym, a dissident writer, said he felt “as if the windows had been pushed open and suddenly fresh air was coming in.” The huge rally made it clear that the people no longer had any interest in preserving the East German state. In the next few days, another fifty thousand people fled the country. The German Democratic Republic was on the verge of total disintegration.

#### The Wall Comes Down

Krenz hesitated but finally decided to bow to the inevitable. On 9 November the East German government announced that, effective the next day, exit visas would be granted automatically to all citizens wishing to “visit the West.” Crowds gathered that night at the eight crossing points in Berlin. They were still suspicious, not sure what would happen; after all, nearly two hundred people had been shot trying to cross the wall that had divided the city for twenty-eight years. The border guards on duty that night had never seen such crowds and were uncertain what to do. They called their headquarters but received no clear instructions. At first they insisted that everyone must

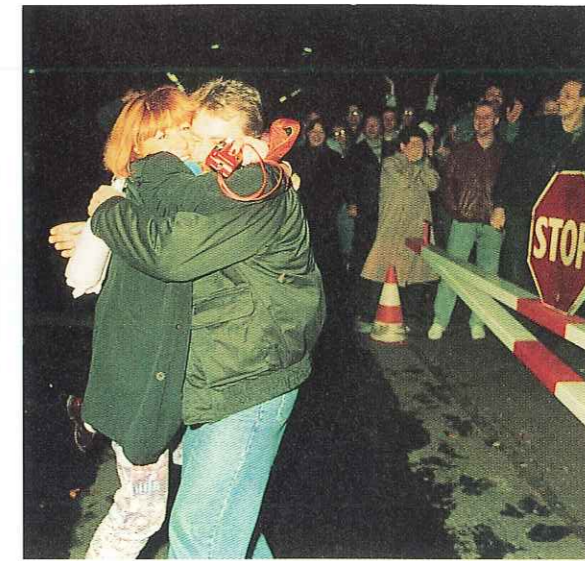
have a valid visa before they could depart the following day. But as numbers grew the situation erupted. People demanded to cross now; why wait for visas? Finally the guards decided to open the gates. At first a few wary individuals passed through. But the trickle soon became an unstoppable flood; hundreds, then thousands, then tens of thousands poured west, across the Berlin Wall, for a taste of freedom. On their side West Berliners came out to welcome and to cheer the Easterners. Families were reunited. Complete strangers embraced each other. With hammers and chisels and anything else that came to hand, people began to chip away at the ugly concrete barrier that snaked through the city. Amidst extraordinary scenes, people power tri-



umphed. Over the next year, bit by bit, the Berlin Wall, symbol of the Cold War, was almost totally demolished.

Pictures of the Wall coming down were carried live on satellite television and seen around the world. Everywhere people were moved, often to tears, by the emotional scenes unfolding in Berlin. Except, perhaps, in the White House. Reporters and television camera crews were permitted into the Oval Office to record the president’s reaction. President Bush sat at his desk, nervously twisting a pen in his hand, and rambled evasively. He said he was “very pleased.” Asked why he did not seem more elated, Bush replied, “I am not an emotional kind of guy.” He did not want, he said, “to dance on the wall.” He feared that might provoke resistance to Gorbachev in Moscow.

Americans were disappointed by their leader’s lack of enthusiasm. Every president since Kennedy had called for the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. Polls showed that 90 per cent of the public thought it “exciting and encouraging.” Critics accused Bush of failing to rise to the occasion. House majority leader Richard Gephardt said, “Even as the walls of the modern Jericho come tumbling down, we have a president who is inadequate to the moment.” Privately Bush was amazed at the developments in Berlin. He told aides, “If the Soviets are going to let the Communists fall in East Germany, they’ve got to be really serious — more serious than I realized.”



ABOVE: Joy unconfined. Hugs and kisses as East Germany opens its borders to the West. ABOVE LEFT: Punk rockers take hammer and chisel to the graffiti-covered concrete of the Berlin Wall.

Gorbachev in private was far from enthusiastic over the toppling of the Wall. Gerasimov described the event as a “positive and important fact,” in line with socialist developments in the Soviet Union. But the prospect of German reunification, of Germany as an economic and political giant at the heart of Europe, filled Gorbachev with anxiety. Moscow did not want to lose East Germany as a “strategic ally” and see it “consolidated” into Western Europe. Gorbachev wrote to Bush and to other Western leaders emphasizing that the Soviet Union had vital interests in the future of Germany, and that events should be handled slowly to prevent their spinning out of control. The president told his staff, “The guy’s really upset.” When West German foreign min-

*Freedom is infectious; the fever spread from East Berlin (BELOW LEFT) to Prague (BELOW). Massive, peaceful demonstrations brought down the Communist government in Czechoslovakia, and no blood was shed. They called it the Velvet Revolution.*



*A hero returns. Alexander Dubček, the Czechoslovak leader deposed by the tanks that crushed the Prague Spring in August 1968, appears again in public. This time, the dream of freedom came true.*

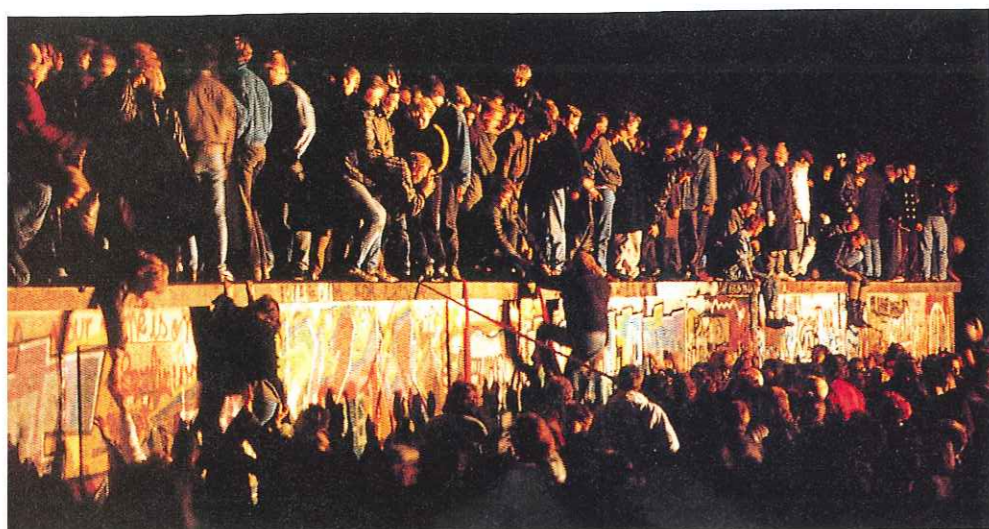
On 20 November 200,000 marched; two days later it was 250,000. Tens of thousands cheered Alexander Dubček, who had led the Prague Spring reform movement of 1968, when he made his first public appearance in Bratislava in more than two decades. On 24 November 350,000 marched through Prague. That night at an emergency Communist Party central committee meeting, the general secretary and the entire Politburo resigned, realizing that there was no hope of Soviet assistance. A new party hierarchy was elected. The dissident playwright Václav Havel, released from prison, denounced the party shake-up as a trick, an attempt to cling to power. A vast crowd of 800,000 demanded democratic elections. Workers went on a two-hour general strike as proof of their solidarity, bringing the entire country to a standstill. In the face of such overwhelming people power, the government caved in, abandoning the “leading role” of the Communist Party and opening the border with Austria. In early December a new coalition government was formed with a majority of non-Communists. On 10 December seventy-three-year-old Gustav Husák, who had been Communist Party leader since 1968, resigned. Free elections were held at the end of the month; in what became known as the Velvet Revolution, Dubček was elected speaker of the federal assembly, and opposition leader Havel was made president. Five out of the six old-line Eastern European Communist regimes had now been removed.

### The Seasick Summit

In the midst of these tumultuous events, Bush and Gorbachev prepared to meet off Malta. Bush, in his briefings on the latest developments in the Soviet Union, was told that most Soviet citizens were still behind Gorbachev and perestroika, but many of them were frustrated by the slowness of economic change and were “impatient to see political reform yield material benefits.” So far the process was “all pain and no gain.” Bush’s advisers predicted that Gorbachev was “in for the long haul,” although 1990 and 1991 would be decisive years. They felt that Moscow probably would resort to some sort of repression against threats of ethnic unrest. More than anything, Bush decided, he must show real support for the Soviet leader — “all the way.”

Gorbachev’s advisers wanted him to do everything to present himself as the equal of Bush and to persuade the US president to expand his view of a US-USSR partnership during this era of change. He was cautioned not to pull out of the hat any dramatic proposals on arms reductions, as at Reykjavik, for this would unsettle, and probably alienate, the practical-minded American president. Both men realized that with the speed of events in Eastern Europe, this “getting to know you” meeting now took on the form of a historic summit.

Gorbachev flew to Malta from Italy, where he had been received rapturously by crowds in Rome. There, he met Pope John Paul II and invited him to the Soviet Union, promising a new law to guarantee religious freedom. He arrived in Malta on the evening of Friday, 1 December. Bush had flown in that morning. The meetings were to take place on two warships, the Soviet guided-missile cruiser *Slava* and the US guided-missile cruiser *Belknap*, the flagship of the Sixth Fleet. The leaders would be away from the prying eyes of the media, with minimal pageantry, and in the sort of privacy favoured by Bush. As both men settled in, a fierce storm began to brew. During the night the weather



ister Hans-Dietrich Genscher visited Moscow in December, Gorbachev told him sharply that Kohl’s newly announced plans for a speedy re-unification were premature and threatened to destabilize Europe.

In East Germany the much-hated secret police force, the Stasi, was disbanded. Krenz was replaced as premier by Communist reformer Hans Modrow, and the Volkskammer, the parliament, renounced the “leading role” of the Communist Party and began to expose the corruption and brutality of the Honecker regime. East Germany seemed to be moving steadily towards the West, but for several more months the Soviets continued resolutely to oppose German re-unification.

The gales of change now swept through Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. The day the Wall came down coincided with a Politburo meeting in Sofia that turned into a showdown between party factions. Todor Zhivkov, the longest-serving leader in Eastern Europe, who had been in power since 1954 and president since 1971, was deposed and replaced by Petar Mladenov, who led the reform group. Under Mladenov, reform communism survived for more than a year in Bulgaria, before finally being swept away by democratic forces.

In Prague on 17 November, a student rally in Wenceslas Square turned into an anti-government protest and was fired on by nervous policemen. Inspired by events in Germany and infuriated by the attempted crackdown, protesters came out onto the streets in greater numbers to demand free elections. An umbrella opposition organization was formed, called Civic Forum.

became so severe that flags were torn from masts and scaffolding set up for television cameras was smashed down. The dinghy full of frogmen sent to guard against amphibious assassins and terrorists was thrown about in the waves. Maltese officials said it was the worst storm they had seen in five years.

On Saturday morning Gorbachev decided it was too rough to cross to the *Slava* from the cruise liner *Maxim Gorky*, which was tied up in the harbour as his floating hotel. Bush agreed to join him on the *Maxim Gorky*. The president and his delegation, which included a very pale secretary of state, made the short journey by launch across the storm-whipped seas to the *Gorky*. There, in the card room of the promenade deck, rapidly made ready for its unexpected guests, Gorbachev met Bush. The president kicked off by telling Gorbachev, "The world will be a better place if perestroika succeeds." He outlined a long list of his economic initiatives. He wanted to start negotiating a US-Soviet trade agreement and to lift the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which barred the USSR from most-favoured-nation trade status, in time for the next summit — proposed for Washington in June 1990. Bush spoke of providing US economic advice. And he would support observer status for the Soviet Union at the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the key organization of international trade. With regard to arms reduction, Bush proposed putting START on the fast track. He wanted to resolve all major issues by the June summit, to agree on the destruction of stocks of chemical weapons and to speed up negotiations on the reduction of conventional forces in Europe (CFE).

Gorbachev listened intently and scribbled notes into a small orange notebook. When he responded to Bush, it was with a long statement about the changing world and the need for the Soviet Union and the United States to change also. He said he had heard the president's repeated statements in sup-

## Riding the Storms at Malta

President Bush was an ex-naval aviator from the Second World War who in his leisure time loved nothing better than to ride the waves in fast boats. On the Saturday afternoon of the Malta summit, when he left the *Maxim Gorky*, television viewers watched aghast as the president and his key foreign policy team, lashed by torrential rain and thrown about in a howling gale, crossed to the USS *Belknap* in a small launch. Once the president was safely aboard the cruiser, his naval and Secret Service detail told Bush that it was too dangerous for him to return. The president and his delegation sat out

the rest of the afternoon staring across sixteen-foot storm swells at the *Maxim Gorky*. "He shouldn't have gone back to that bloody ship," pronounced Georgi Arbatov, a member of the Soviet delegation. The debacle provided the waiting media with a field day. The leaders of the world's two most powerful nations, they reported, had flown halfway around the globe at this critical point in world history only to be kept a thousand yards apart by a raging storm. Along with the inevitable jokes about the superpowers being rocked by forces beyond their control, reporters spoke of the

***There is virtually no problem in the world — and certainly no problem in Europe — that improvement in the US-Soviet relationship will not help to ameliorate. A better US-Soviet relationship is to be valued in and of itself, but it should also be an instrument of positive change for the world.***

— George Bush,  
at the joint press conference concluding the Malta summit, 3 December 1989

"seasick summit." That evening Bush and those of his team who could bear it enjoyed a magnificent dinner. The president said he was sorry Gorbachev could not join them to "get an idea of what US Navy food is like."



In shipboard meetings at Malta, Gorbachev and Bush declare that their countries are no longer enemies. Ahead, co-operation. The Cold War had lasted from Yalta to Malta.

port of perestroika but only now had seen evidence of this. "I was going to ask you today to go beyond words," he smiled, "but you have done so." To the question of on-site arms verification, Gorbachev said, "You can have as many inspectors as you want." On troop withdrawals from Eastern Europe, Gorbachev agreed, admitting, "We're aware that our troops are unwelcome there anyway." To Robert Blackwill, one of the few American aides at the table with Bush, this sense of genuine rapport seemed to be the transforming moment of the post-Second World War era.

The one divisive issue was still Central America, which Bush described to Gorbachev as "like a gigantic thorn in your shoe." He provided evidence of Cuban arms being shipped to the Sandinistas and Nicaraguan support for the rebels in El Salvador. Gorbachev broke in and said, "I've told Castro he's out of step with us and should be doing what the East Europeans are doing. But he's his own man." Gorbachev made it clear that the Soviets "cannot dictate to him." In their private conversations later, this again became an issue. Gorbachev countered Bush by accusing him of intervening in the Philippines, sending jets to support the regime of President Corazon Aquino, as well as in Panama and Colombia, and told him not to be so self-righteous about Central America. With the United States apparently interfering in the affairs of other states, Gorbachev asked if the Brezhnev Doctrine was about to be replaced by the Bush Doctrine. The president was not amused.

The full delegations met again for lunch, and as waiters served them silver bowls of the best Russian caviar, they discussed the Soviet Union's economic problems. The intention then was to adjourn for three hours of "private time" before another session aboard the *Gorky*, to be followed by a working dinner on the *Belknap*. As the storm raged about them, Gorbachev suggested that Bush remain on the *Gorky*, but the president insisted on returning to his ship. As the storms closed in there would be no further talks that day.

By Sunday morning the storm had abated a little, but the meetings intended for the *Belknap* were transferred to the more stable *Maxim Gorky*. Gorbachev told Bush that the changes in Europe opened up an important role for the United States on the continent. "We want you in Europe. You need to be in Europe," affirmed Gorbachev. Then decisively he went on to say, "We don't consider you as an enemy anymore. Things have changed." He assured Bush that the Soviet Union would never start a war against the United States. For some present, this was the determining sentence that ended an era.

Gorbachev urged Bush not to use one-sided expressions about the changes in Eastern Europe, such as describing them as the "triumph of Western values." "Why do you have to say Western? We have these values too," said Gorbachev. Baker suggested calling them "democratic values," and Gorbachev agreed. Bush saw Western values as the same as democratic values, but he would be careful in future to avoid triumphalist language offensive to the Soviets and would refer only to "universal" values.

After the morning session it was decided to hold a joint press conference — another first for this historic meeting. In front of the world's media in the hastily prepared discotheque of the *Gorky*, Bush and Gorbachev exemplified

the new spirit of co-operation and partnership between two nations that had opposed each other for forty-four years. "We stand at the threshold of a brand new era of US-Soviet relations," claimed Bush. "This is just the beginning," said Gorbachev. "We're just at the very beginning of our long road to long-lasting peace." No agreements were signed at Malta, but in many ways the meeting marked a symbolic end to the Cold War. It offered a glimpse ahead to a new relationship between East and West. Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gerasimov quipped to journalists, "We buried the Cold War at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea."



In Romania, a grim coda to Eastern Europe's transformation. ABOVE: Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife, Elena, after their capture. Court-martialled for crimes against their own people, they were sentenced to death and shot. ABOVE RIGHT: Romanians express grief, and the will to resist, as the bodies of countrymen killed in the uprising are borne by.



### The Last Stalinist

To the extraordinary events of 1989, there was one grim postscript. The only Eastern European nation still ruled by its old-school Communist leader was Romania. The tyrant Nicolae Ceausescu had run the country with a rod of iron since 1965, turning it into a police state. The Securitate, the secret police, terrorized people into submission while Ceausescu imposed his Stalinist will over the nation and its economy. At a meeting of Warsaw Pact leaders in Moscow the day after Gorbachev returned from Malta, Ceausescu was the sole Eastern European Communist Party boss still in office since the last Warsaw Pact summit, only five months before. Gorbachev spoke of eliminating the Cold War; Ceausescu said the West was "out to liquidate socialism." He called for building up the Warsaw Pact against the common danger of NATO. The other Eastern European heads ignored him. They went on to support a Czech resolution condemning the Soviet invasion of 1968. Ceausescu refused to sign. After a "frank exchange of opinions" with Gorbachev, the Romanian leader flew home in a bad temper.

Two weeks later Ceausescu's secret police opened fire on protesters who had gathered in the traditionally dissident Transylvanian city of Timisoara, in the west of Romania. For several days the shootings continued, but still people came out onto the streets in ever growing numbers. On 22 December, Ceausescu gave a prepared speech from the balcony of his presidential palace

in Bucharest to a huge, specially assembled crowd. He intended to show he still had supporters and to use the speech to restore order, and it was carried live on television. But Romanians had had enough. There were catcalls, booing, and whistling. A dazed Ceausescu broke off his speech and retired from the balcony. He decided to flee. Next day he was carried away in a helicopter as the unarmed crowd stormed the Communist Party headquarters. A National Salvation Front was declared, consisting of former Ceausescu aides and a few prominent dissidents, and the army transferred its allegiance to the new government. There was sporadic street fighting between soldiers and the remaining secret policemen loyal to the old regime. The United States informed the Soviets that if they decided to intervene militarily against Ceausescu's supporters, Washington would not object. No intervention was needed. The day they fled, Ceausescu and his equally unpopular wife, Elena, who was a Politburo member and the country's de facto vice president, were caught by forces of the new regime. They were put before a military tribunal, whose legality they refused to accept. After a hasty trial, they were taken out and shot on Christmas Day. Their bodies were shown on Romanian television, and throughout the world.

At the beginning of 1989 the Iron Curtain still divided Europe, as it had done for more than forty years. By the end of the year, the leaders of every Eastern European nation except Bulgaria, which soon followed suit, had been ousted by popular uprisings; in every case the will of the people had prevailed and, except in Romania, hardly a drop of blood was spilt. With dizzying speed, the Soviet Union's European empire, the buffer zone ruthlessly built up by Stalin and maintained with brutal force when necessary by his successors, had imploded. Truly, 1989 was an annus mirabilis.



Romanian revolutionaries joy-ride through Bucharest in a commandeered truck. At first chaos followed the ending of dictatorship.