



## Main events in the conservative 1980s

### The New Right

In America and Great Britain, the 1980s saw the rise of conservatism in political and cultural life, and the two countries were led by the American Republican Party with President Ronald Reagan and the British Conservative Party with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the 'iron lady'. These administrations cut taxes, reduced the government intervention on health, education and housing programmes, encouraged privatisation. Defence spending was increased, and in 1982 the UK defeated Argentina after the invasion of the Falkland islands.

### The Collapse of Communism

During the 1980s, Communist states experienced a wave of reformist policies that brought first to agreements between Reagan and the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, and then to the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, leading to German reunification, the definitive disintegration of the Warsaw Pact, and the end of the Cold War. Unfortunately, 1989 was also the year when in China the protests of the students in Tiananmen Square in Beijing were violently put down by the government causing a massacre.

### Live Aid

Famine in Ethiopia was shown to the world on TV in mid-1980s, and the western world tried to find new ways to raise money and help. In 1985, the famous Live Aid concert was organised, and many of the most popular stars contributed per-

forming for free in cities all around the world.

### Technology

After the creation of Microsoft and Apple towards the end of the 1970s, the computer age had its real start. Personal computers entered the offices and then people's homes. Video-games were widespread in arcades and then on personal computers, the most popular games being Space Invaders and Pac Man. Another technology that was also just starting was that of cellular mobile phones.

### The Environment

In the 1980s opposition to nuclear power plants grew, especially after the catastrophe of 1986 with Chernobyl accident. In addition, people's awareness of the problems of the planet increased, and more research was done on the effect of global warming.

### AIDS

While gay rights became more widely accepted in the Western world, the discovery of AIDS (the very first case diagnosed in 1981) allowed the Christian Right to condemn homosexuals, claiming AIDS was God's punishment for homosexuals' "loose morals". In the meantime, in the USA several protests demanded an action of the government against AIDS, especially after AIDS-related deaths of celebrities like American actor Rock Hudson and the case of a child infected by the HIV virus through contaminated blood supplies.

## ACTIVITIES

1 List the people mentioned in the text that were particularly significant in the decade. Define also their role.

- 1 .....
- 2 .....
- 3 .....

2 Complete the table with the most important events of the period.

1981	
1982	
1985	
1986	
1989	

3 Look for more detailed historical notes about the following events: Thatcherism; the massacre of Tiananmen Square; the nuclear disaster of Chernobyl; the end of the Cold War.

4 See the film *Brassed Off* by Mark Herman, a story set in the years of Thatcherism.