

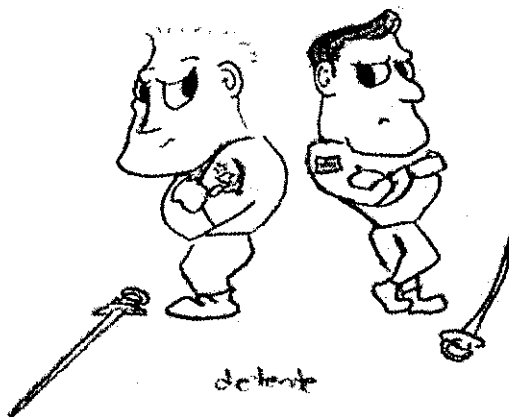
# READING ONE DÉTENTE BEGINS

In 1953, at the height of the Cold War, US officials gave a speech in which the United States threatened that they would "retaliate instantly, by means and at places of our own choosing." This willingness to go to the brink, or edge, of war became known as **brinkmanship**. This policy was followed during the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson Administrations in the US. Events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1963 and Vietnam War showed how close the world came to a superpower conflict.

In the 1970's, the United States and the Soviet Union finally backed away from this aggressive policy. The superpowers slowly moved toward a period of lowered tensions. President Richard Nixon was elected in 1968 and he replaced brinkmanship with a period known as **Détente**.

Détente is a French word meaning "a loosening" so applied to politics it meant a slowing of the Cold War tensions. In 1972, Nixon became the first US president to visit Communist China. Three months later, Nixon made history again by becoming the first American president to visit the Soviet Union. The Soviet leader also made the trip to America and was photographed at Disneyland.

After a series of meetings called the **Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT)**, Nixon and Brezhnev signed the SALT 1 Treaty. This five-year agreement limited the number of ballistic and submarine-launched missiles each country could have. In 1975, 33 nations joined the United States and the Soviet Union in signing a commitment to détente and cooperation, **The Helsinki Accords**.



## READING TWO DÉTENTE COOLS

Détente was defined as a period in the 1970's where the Cold War wasn't so Cold. Under Presidents Nixon and Ford, the United States gradually improved relations with China and the Soviet Union.

In the late 1970's, however, President Jimmy Carter's concern over harsh treatment of Soviet protesters threatened to prevent a second round of SALT negotiations. In June 1979, Carter and Brezhnev finally signed the SALT II Agreement but the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December of that year. In response, US Congress refused to ratify the SALT treaty making it useless.

The fiercely anti-Communist US President Ronald Reagan took office in 1981. He continued his country's retreat from détente. In 1983, he announced a program called the Strategic Defense Initiative to protect America against enemy missiles. The program was called Star Wars after a popular movie. Tensions between the two superpowers rose further when it became known that the United States was helping



anti-communist forces in Nicaragua. Under Reagan, the United States began a huge program designed to build up their military in the face of this renewed Soviet threat.

U.S. President  
Ronald Reagan

## READING THREE MIKHAIL GORBACHEV AND GLASNOST

When Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev died in 1982, the aging leadership of the Soviet Union tried to hold onto power. Time was against them, however. Each of Brezhnev's two successors died after only about a year in office. Who would succeed them?

To answer that question, the leaders of the Communist Party **chose Mikhail Gorbachev**. His supporters praised his youth, energy and his political skills. The Communist leaders, however, did not realize that Gorbachev would change the face of the Soviet Union completely.

Past Soviet leaders had created a totalitarian state. It rewarded silence and discouraged individuals from acting on their own. As a result, Soviet society rarely changed. Gorbachev realized that economic and social reforms could not occur without a free flow of ideas and information. In 1985, he announced a policy known as **glasnost** or openness. He encouraged Soviet citizens to discuss ways to improve their society.

Glasnost brought remarkable changes. The government allowed churches to open. It released political prisoners from jail and allowed the publication of books by previously banned authors. Reporters actively investigated social problems and openly criticized government officials.

Many vocalized the problems of the old Soviet Union. Angry consumers protested that they had to stand in long lines to buy food, soap and other basics because the Soviet system could not make enough to keep people supplied.



## READING FOUR MIKHAIL GORBACHEV AND PERESTROIKA

In 1982, the Communist leaders in the Soviet Union chose a new leader. His name was Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev was young and enthusiastic who was faced with some serious problems in the Soviet Union. There had been little change in society since Stalin's time. In a society where everyone is treated the same, there is little incentive to invent new ideas or work harder. Shortages of basic supplies such as food and housing were severe. Gorbachev was trying to change this.

Gorbachev blamed these problems on the Soviet Union's inefficient system of central planning. Under central planning, party officials told farm and factory managers how much to produce. They also told them what wages to pay, and what prices to charge. Because individuals could not increase their pay by producing more, they had little motive to improve efficiency.

In 1985, Gorbachev introduced the idea of **perestroika** or economic restructuring. In 1986, he made changes to revive the Soviet economy. Local managers gained greater authority over their farms and factories, and people were allowed to open small private business.

Gorbachev's goal was not to throw out communism, but to make the system more efficient and productive.



## READING FIVE : POLAND ABANDONS COMMUNISM

Under leader Mikhail Gorbachev, the old Soviet Union was adopting more reforms and changes in their society. His new thinking led him to urge his Eastern European allies to open up their own economic and political systems.

Poland was among the first countries in Eastern Europe to embrace the spirit of change. Before Gorbachev's reforms, a man by the name of **Lech Walesa** had already become a national hero in Poland for leading workers on a strike to demand government recognition of the labor union called **Solidarity**. When the Polish government tried to end the agreement with the labor union, the economy failed quickly. Public discontent deepened as workers publicly backed the Solidarity movement. This time, however, the government agreed to free elections in 1989 and 1990. Polish voters overwhelmingly voted out the Communists and elected the Solidarity leaders.

Shortly after this, Hungarian leaders also launched sweeping reform programs. By 1990, non-Communist leaders had control of the country.



# READING SIX: COMMUNISM FALLS IN GERMANY

Since a new leader with an eye toward reform had taken control of the Soviet Union, changes were taking place throughout Europe. Hungary and Poland had allowed free elections in 1989 and 1990. East German leaders, however, remained stubbornly resistant to reform.

One of the biggest blows to East German resistance to change came from an unlikely source. In 1989, neighboring Hungary allowed vacationing East German tourists to cross the border into Austria. From there they could travel to West Germany. Thousands of East Germans took this new escape route.

In response, the East German government closed its borders entirely. By October 1989, huge demonstrations had broken out in cities across East Germany. The protesters demanded the right to travel freely and later added the demand for free elections. East German leaders were rapidly losing control. By 1989, they made a bold decision. The government opened the **Berlin Wall** that had stood as a symbol of the Cold War for almost 50 years.

On November 9, 1989, the wall was opened. Thousands of East Germans poured into West Berlin. The long-divided city of Berlin erupted in joyous celebration. Once-feared border guards smiled as huge crowds climbed on top of the wall to celebrate. The Berlin Wall was symbolically torn down by the protestors.

By the end of the year, the Communist party ceased to exist in Germany. The next step was to look to unifying the two halves of the once powerful nation of Germany.

In October 1990, forty five years after their crushing defeat in World II, Germany was officially reunited.



## READING SEVEN: THE FAILED COUP

Mikhail Gorbachev had brought reform to the Soviet Union, but he had also lost control of the Soviet Union and her satellite nations. Free elections were held in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary and the communists were losing power. Germany was working on reunification plans. Internal problems were rising as the Soviet provinces were demanding their own independence.

In August of 1991, Communist hardliners attempted to regain control of the country by force in an attempted coup to overthrow Gorbachev. When Gorbachev was out of Moscow on vacation, troops met him there to detain him and keep him from returning to Moscow. They demanded his resignation as Soviet president. Early the next day, hundreds of tanks and armored vehicles rolled into Moscow. The hard line communists assumed that the Soviet people would be terrified of this show of force. However, the Soviet people had lost their fear of the party. They were willing to defend their freedoms. Protesters gathered at the office of a Russian leader named **Boris Yeltsin** to show they were not afraid of the tanks.

Hardliners then ordered the troops to attack the parliament, but the troops refused and the coup attempt was over. Within a few days Gorbachev was back in control of Moscow.

The attempt by the communists to take control of the government angered people. Gorbachev resigned his position within the Communist Party. The Soviet parliament ended all communist party activities. Having first seized power in 1917 in a coup that succeeded, the all-powerful Communist Party now collapsed because of a **coup** that failed.



# READING EIGHT: COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had begun a series of reform movements in order to help the economy grow. As he lessened control of the Soviet Union, he also lessened control of the **satellite** nations. Without the tight fist of the Soviet Union, Poland, Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Romania all began movements towards solid democratic nations. The power of the Soviet Union was falling apart and they were not strong enough to stop it. More nations began to fight for freedom from Soviet control, but these nations began to come from within the Soviet Union's borders.

There were more than 100 ethnic groups represented in the old Soviet Union. Russians were the largest, most powerful group. However, **non-Russians** formed a majority in the 14 soviet republics other than Russia.

Ethnic tensions brewed beneath the surface of Soviet society. As reforms loosened central controls, unrest spread across the country. Nationalist groups in **Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldavia** demanded self-rule. The Muslim peoples of Soviet central Asia called for religious reform. The failed coup attempt in August 1991 was the final straw.

**Estonia and Latvia** quickly declared their independence and formed their own countries. Other republics soon followed. By early December 1991, all 15 republics of the Soviet Union had declared independence. Leaders of some of the new nations met to form a loose agreement of independent nations. On Christmas Day 1991, Gorbachev resigned as head of the Soviet Union, a country that no longer existed.

