

Forty years ago, in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, the Allied Nations signed the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, otherwise known as the GATT, a document designed to establish an open and orderly world trading system. Since then, there have been seven rounds of multilateral trade negotiations, the last one being the Tokyo Round in 1979. Some progress has been made, but the world's trading nations still haven't got their act together. For every tariff barrier that comes down under the GATT, it seems like another kind of barrier goes up. A quota here, a voluntary restraint agreement there, a change in regulations somewhere else -- whatever will protect local industries that can't quite compete. I sometimes think that man reserves his greatest creativity for building new kinds of walls.

Aside from outright trade barriers, we face other problems as well. World production has tripled in the past 40 years, and a lot of the new production is coming from countries in the Pacific Rim and elsewhere which have been successfully building their industries. There is, in other words, a lot more competition out there in the market than there ever has been before.

There have also been fundamental changes in the market, in what people want to buy. Plastics are up, base metals are down. High technology is sweeping the world.

In the U.S. alone, the information technology industry now brings in as much revenue as the auto industry. Worldwide, it will be the biggest manufacturing industry in less than five years. And if you want a real mind-blower, at least four countries are on the threshold of producing a computer that will approximate the human brain. And I heard on the radio the other day about the wedding of two Japanese computer workers. A robot performed the ceremony.

What we are facing, indeed, has been referred to as a "collection of revolutions coming together". We are in the midst of what may be the most fundamental transition of our history -- a transition rooted in technology but involving almost everything that touches our lives; our energy base, our financial system, our industrial structure, our employment structure, our family structure, the way we communicate, even our framework of beliefs.

This is too much to cope with all at once, but we can at least try to tackle it piece by piece. Under Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, what the Federal Government is trying to do is