

It is now impossible to argue that Marxism has not failed. The people of the Eastern Bloc are declaring this daily. And governments themselves are acknowledging its truth. Marxism is fading not because it is regarded by it's subjects as wrong; it is being abandoned because it doesn't work. It doesn't deliver.

But it is easier to reject a bad system than to build a good one.

Having wrested power from the old regimes, the new regimes must learn how to exercise power. And a new sort of power. Democratic power. The most subtle form of government.

None of these countries has had recent experience with democracy. And in many of them there is no history of democracy. Teaching tolerance in societies which have spent the last forty years enduring intolerance is not an easy task. The limits of acceptable debate and discourse are not easy to define. Democracy is not a gadget to be assembled with an instruction booklet. It is a state of mind, a cultural habit.

On Friday, at the Nickle Arts Museum, the Magna Carta will be put on display. That document, a contract between King John and his people, was signed in the year 1215 - 775 years ago. The deal it consummated was the birth of the British democratic tradition - a tradition on which Canadian democracy is ultimately based. In the 775 years between the signature of the Magna Carta and today, civil wars have been fought in Britain over the development of democratic principles. Riots have occurred. Kings have been be-headed. Eastern Europe is attempting to do in a matter of months - peacefully - what has taken us almost eight centuries to achieve.