

SYNOPSIS

We have been accustomed to thinking of Canada's multiculturalism exclusively in Canadian domestic terms, but there is an international dimension, a dimension which gives us direct access to a multitude of countries and helps us understand them better.

Sometimes these links create problems when foreign disputes are imported into Canada, but most often as in the case of the Baltic communities in Canada, they create opportunities we should act upon. The presence in Canada of citizens with origins in Central and Eastern Europe gives our country direct and personal connections with Solidarity activists, nationalities of the Baltic States and encourages our ability to encourage glasnost and perestroika. There is a creative, constructive opportunity to make use of Canada's human links to Europe when the Prime Minister and I seek the advice of business leaders pursuing joint ventures in the Soviet Union or when I meet the families who are trying to bring Refusniks or former political prisoners to Canada. But we must be sensible and deliberate, and guided by the pragmatism that makes foreign policy effective. By displaying imagination here at home we can encourage new thinking in the Soviet Union and Eastern and Central Europe.

President Gorbachev recognized a reality which the Chinese leadership has not-- that economic reform cannot occur without political reform. Fundamental change has occurred in the Soviet Union and more can, and should, be expected. But change should not be so rapid as to provoke a reaction that will undermine successes. The leaders of the Popular Fronts in the Baltic States have demonstrated wisdom in a volatile situation, seeking a peaceful transition to independence. We encourage the Soviet authorities to accept that their best interests are served by granting maximum freedoms to the people of the Baltic States.

New leadership in the USSR provides solid grounds for believing that the will of the people can and will be expressed. We know of no political prisoners today in the Soviet Union, religious tolerance is increasing there, and emigration is higher now than at any time in the past 10 years. Canada has no unresolved family reunification cases with the USSR and private visits to Canada from the USSR increased to 12,000 in 1988 (5,000 in 1986). The democratization process is a major step forward in the USSR. It is only a beginning, but it is a good beginning.

The most remarkable development is a flowering of popular movements in the three Baltic States. The election of popular front representatives to the Congress of People's Deputies gives them a national forum for the pursuit of their objectives. The outcome of this contest of wills between Baltic Supreme Soviets and Moscow is far from clear. The aspirations of the Baltic peoples will not be met all at once, but this government applauds