

The invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and its allies was a harsh and chilling reminder that we must still live with the legacies of the past - that the peaceful evolution of Europe toward détente, out of which entente might in due course emerge, is seen as intolerable by those to whom freedom is a threat and any change a counter-revolution. Yet, if any real and enduring understanding between East and West is to be achieved, there must be a transformation of attitudes. Unless that takes place there is little hope for the development of mutual understanding.

What sort of transformation is possible? We do not expect the abandonment of their social system by the Communist states. We have no intention of abandoning ours. Given these basic positions, we can hope for progress only through the slow development of confidence, based on genuine respect for differences. No Western country had any part in the course of reform which Czechoslovakia took at the beginning of this year. Knowing the risks they ran, and respecting the choices they would make, it would have been irresponsible and wrong to have sought to influence the Czechoslovak people in their course. We responded with friendship to their friendship freely offered. We never questioned their right or intention to retain their ties with the rest of Eastern Europe. We could only hope, as the Czechoslovaks did, that the Soviet Union would not find freedom and friendship intolerably inconsistent with the principles by which its own policies are governed.

Our hopes, and the hopes, as I have said, of all on both sides who believe that genuine East-West confidence and co-operation is possible, have been callously crushed. Thinking people must now ask themselves whether peaceful co-operation is really possible, when the Soviet Union, without the least justification and ignoring the basic principles of international law and of the United Nations Charter -- the sovereign equality of states and their obligation to refrain from the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of others --, is openly coercing Czechoslovakia by military occupation. In addressing the General Assembly of the United Nations last week, I reminded delegates that, less than two years ago, as a result of an initiative by the U.S.S.R. itself, the Assembly had declared, with no dissenting voice, that: "No state has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal affairs of any other state. Consequently, armed intervention and all other forms of interference or attempted threats against the personality of the state or against its political, economic and cultural elements, are condemned".

But such principles, the Soviet Government itself now tells us, are of no importance when the U.S.S.R. decides that its own political interests are better served without them. "Nobody," we are told, "will be allowed to wrest a single link from the socialist chain." The metaphor is unfortunately all too apt.

I told the United Nations General Assembly that, for our part, Canada cannot and will not accept the claim that some alleged community of interest, be it political or cultural or economic, can ever under any circumstances entitle one country to interfere in the internal affairs of another. We recognize no "spheres of influence". States have every right to their legitimate security interests, but not at the expense of the sovereignty and