

Five months ago Alexander Rabinovich was again denied the right to leave the Soviet Union, because "he was party to state secrets, having worked a decade ago, in a Soviet communications facility." Last Sunday, the Rabinoviches were reunited with their family in Canada, because the question had been brought to the direct attention of the highest leadership in the Soviet Union.

That is but one sign of what can only be called a revolution sweeping Soviet society. It is one of the most significant, intriguing, and hopeful, trends in the world today, and has profound implications for East/West relations generally, and for Canada's relations with the Soviet Union and the countries of the Warsaw Pact.

The reaction of the West to these developments in the Soviet Union has been mixed;

- we are awed by their pace and scope;
- we are sceptical of their permanence and intent;
- we are apprehensive about both their success and their failure;
- and we are hopeful for ourselves and our children.

Those mixed reactions are understandable, and appropriate.

When frames of reference collapse; when some tried and true concepts are tested; when old limits shatter and new horizons emerge: the intuitive response is often to deny the change or to say that everything has changed. The challenge is to identify what has changed, and what that means for us.

Some scepticism is natural. After all,

- we have seen hopes raised before, only to be dashed;
- we have seen promises made, only to be broken;
- and an earlier generation was promised "peace in our time" only to return to conflict and recrimination.

But today, I believe we have entered a watershed. We are there partly due to our own persistence and prudence. The unity and the initiatives of the Western Alliance have made it possible and necessary for changes to come within the Soviet Union. But the fact that the changes have come, and are so pervasive and profound, is due to Mikhail Gorbachev, and the reformers he has brought to power. Mr. Gorbachev is embarked upon a journey of almost unprecedented risk, challenge and promise. He has undertaken to re-make Soviet society - initially from the top down and eventually from the bottom up.