

This has been a year of dramatic changes in world history.

The Berlin wall is now rubble;

The Iron Curtain is down;

The Eastern Bloc is a bloc no more;

The Cold War is over;

Throughout Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia, democracy and the free market are making new converts and securing new ventures;

Nelson Mandela is free, and discussions to end apartheid are underway.

Canadians are involved in those changes - excited by them. In some cases, we have been fighting for those reforms for years - helping bring dissidents like Danylo Shumuk out of Soviet prisons; using our embassies to encourage Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia, and Solidarity in Poland - leading the Commonwealth in the fight against apartheid. And, having helped to end old systems, we are also helping to build new ones, systems that will enshrine freedom and be strong enough to endure.

One in ten Canadians has origins behind what used to be the Iron Curtain, and Canada is mounting a major program to build democratic institutions and market economies in Eastern and Central Europe. The Prime Minister has played a leading role in securing observer status for the Soviet Union at the GATT, and in closing the gap between Soviet leaders and the leaders of the G-7 economies and of NATO. In South Africa, we have launched a program to ensure that, in the negotiations to end apartheid, both sides have the best legal and constitutional expertise.

But we Canadians have also, in our distinct way, made some history of our own.

If Eastern Europe and South Africa demonstrate that bad systems fail and fall apart, we Canadians are demonstrating that good systems work, when there is a will to make them work.

While the First Ministers were enjoying one another's company for seven days and seven nights, I spent two days in separate meetings with the Foreign Ministers of NATO and the Helsinki process. That was a period in the week when it looked like the Meech Lake discussions might fail. I spoke of our problems to Ministers from Hungary, Germany, Romania, the United States, the United Kingdom, Yugoslavia - and they could not believe that a country as envied and respected as Canada would put itself at risk. And particularly that we would put ourselves at risk over the question of how we deal with different cultures - because that is the signature of Canada, the success that is admired around the world, the success that new governments in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union and a united Germany, and a new South Africa, will want to copy. Paul Desmarais said the other day that he wished Canadians would show as much respect for our extraordinary country as foreigners do.