

Political Relations

In the last half of the 1980s, the Soviet Union has undergone major reforms that have affected the structure of its economic, political and judicial systems. These reforms have created a new sense of optimism about the future of Canada-U.S.S.R. relations.

A key change in the political structure of the state has been the decision to elect representatives to a new Congress of Peoples' Deputies. This congress acts not only as a debating body, but also elects members to the Supreme Soviet, the U.S.S.R.'s legislature. Other political reforms include limiting the terms of office for all officials and redefining the functions and relations between the Communist Party and the government.

From the Canadian perspective, many of the political irritants that had impeded the development of relations between the two countries have been resolved. Most political prisoners in the Soviet Union have been released. Emigration from the U.S.S.R. to Canada and elsewhere has been allowed to grow significantly. And there are at present no family reunification cases pending between Canada and the U.S.S.R.

Consultations between the two governments have been increasing on a widening agenda of issues: the United Nations, nuclear energy, the environment, foreign policy formulation, arms control and disarmament, and human rights.

The two countries have mixed commissions on agriculture, economic matters, culture, academic relations and sports, as well as regular consultations on Arctic co-operation. Contacts are burgeoning at other levels. Two Canadian provinces have signed formal agreements with Soviet republics. Winnipeg is twinned with Kiev and Lvov, Vancouver with Odessa and other cities are seeking closer ties, as are many universities.

The Prime Minister's visit to the U.S.S.R. will provide further opportunities for co-operation between the two countries.