

I was especially struck by a recent comment made by Alexander Yakovlev, one of the senior Politburo members. Yakovlev, a close confidant and supporter of Gorbachev, is one of the intellectual forces behind the current reform programme in the USSR. He was for ten years Soviet Ambassador to Canada. He said that his observations of Canadian political and parliamentary life had convinced him that multiparty democracy and pluralism were not the sort of evolution he would ever want to see in his own country.

We must conclude from this that Soviet values and political culture will not converge with western values in the foreseeable future. While they talk of democracy and pluralism they also believe in a one-party state. While they seek to be more responsive to the will of the people, they do not intend to turn the reins of power over to them. And in any event, there is no warrant in Russian history, either before the Revolution or since, for the view that the Soviet Union will eventually evolve into a free society as we understand the term.

At the same time that we commend and encourage Mr. Gorbachev's reforms, we must remember the nature and the history of the Soviet system. Is it acceptable that while some religious groups enjoy greater freedom, others such as Ukrainian Catholics do not? Is not the freedom to worship an indivisible one? Would the practice of internal exile to a closed city be acceptable to any western democracy? Andrey Sakharov's exile to Gorky, with all its sad history of harassment by the KGB, remains very real for some Soviets. Can we forget the unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Afghanistan and the savage war which followed?

Nor should we forget that several European states which were Western historically and culturally for centuries are now under the control of regimes imposed and sustained by Soviet armies. Canadians know this full well. Many of our citizens can testify through bitter personal and family experience that the imposition of communist rule in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia or the German Democratic Republic effectively suppressed traditional political, social and cultural values in these nations. And while some of these governments have introduced positive reforms, others seem impervious to glasnost and the winds of change.