

So too debate and dissent is not disintegration. It's democracy. Debate is how change happens, how reform takes place, how systems survive. To see debate as impending disaster is to treat the Soviet Union as it was, not as it has become or as we would wish it to be.

In addition, I believe we are sometimes hearing the perspectives of Moscow and Russia when we hear of problems and predictions of disaster in the Soviet Union. Russia is now facing problems which have existed for years in the rest of the Soviet Union. The problems have come home to the centre. They are no longer the plight of peoples far away, peoples long ignored.

Finally, we cannot ignore the capacity of the population of the Soviet Union to endure hardship. That too has its limits. But it is not to be discounted.

But these factors explain some problems and put them in perspective. They do not mean those problems don't exist, because they do.

The essential challenge facing the Soviet Union is that the old system has been discredited and in large part abandoned, but nothing which works has yet to be put in place. There is a vacuum politically, economically, and institutionally. The Communist Party has lost its legitimacy and its monopoly, but it still runs much of the system. The Soviet federation is not accepted as currently configured, and while Mr. Gorbachev's proposals for reform this week are far-reaching and seem inspired, it is unsure whether the constituent Republics are in a position to accept. The command economy is in disarray and an open market is being declared. But the open market does not yet exist. It is an economy in search of economics, and of jurisdictional definitions. Who owns what? Who decides? The economy, moreover, is largely an integrated one, based on transfers of functions to various republics sometimes against economics. How to unravel and restructure an economy which is unnatural and closely knit will be extraordinarily difficult.

It might be tempting for some in the face of those problems to backtrack, to re-establish authority and retreat to the old ways. But that will not succeed. It will not succeed because that system won't work. It didn't work and that's why we have reform. But there is another factor. And that is that the people -- much as they are discomforted by deprivation or discord -- now know freedom. That cannot be taken away.

Mr. Gorbachev is committed to reform. The problem is not the fact of reform. The problem is the pace and the problem is the transition. That transition will never be easy. But a