

OPINION

It seems to me... by Milan Martinic

The winds of change are blowing with surprising strength and faster than anyone could have imagined.

We are privileged to witness some of the most dramatic changes in the global political make up. The extraordinary events in the Soviet bloc have brought the course of human history to the threshold of its most fascinating, challenging and dangerous period.

The surprising collapse of iron-hand totalitarian regimes, led not by military might but rather by economic collapse and that most human desire to right wrongs and live to the highest potential, is in itself the story of the century.

In the last few months, we have been witness to free elections in Poland, and the disintegration of the communist party in Hungary.

East Germans were allowed to escape to the West by Warsaw Pact sister and ideological twin Czechoslovakia, and that set the stage for the most unique turnaround in East German communist policy following a visit by Mikhail Gorbachev.

Yet, to find the head of what must still be called the Soviet empire presiding over the unraveling of the communist fiber, is in itself

a great paradox.

And the world is unsure of how to react.

East Germans don't want to believe in the old, oppressive guard. Overnight they have found a voice, and nothing Egon Krenz can say or do—short of a return to military repression—will legitimize his power. East Germany's political thirst will only be satisfied by legitimate elections in which they can vote against the communists as Poland did last spring.

But they are sure to find soon that political—and economic—freedom does not bring immediate economic bliss as the Soviets well know. And the quick trip to the West is the fastest way to securing a better life.

This poses a problem for West Germany which will see its dream of national unification realized to nightmarish proportions as Germany unifies itself on the west side of the wall.

By next year Hungary will have banished all communist signs from atop its public buildings, and its Western-style socialist government plans to consider leaving the Warsaw Pact.

Repeating a frequent refrain

of new Soviet leadership, Soviet Foreign Ministry Gennadi Gerasimov said Moscow was prepared to disband the Warsaw pact provided NATO simultaneously did the same.

But NATO and the Warsaw Pact have kept Europe from war for more than 45 years. And the world is not all that uncomfortable with that arrangement.

The alternative risks in becoming a dangerous power vacuum, the consequences and stability of Europe as other political and ethnic rivalries are rekindled.

And that dramatizes the dangers of the sweeping changes—changes that Western leaders have called for in almost half a century of rhetoric—and the need for understanding of the possible consequences. And to draw the rules for the new game.

"We are moving from the post-war European home," the Soviets say, adding that Mikhail Gorbachev is eager to discuss the changes in Eastern Europe when he meets with President Bush next month abroad military ships off the coast of Malta. That could make this "non-summit" the most important meeting of the superpowers since Yalta.

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CORRECTION:

In Nov. 7's editorial, titled, "The Mad Man of Romania," The capital of Romania was incorrectly identified as Budapest, rather than Bucharest. The Yellin' Rebel apologizes for this error.

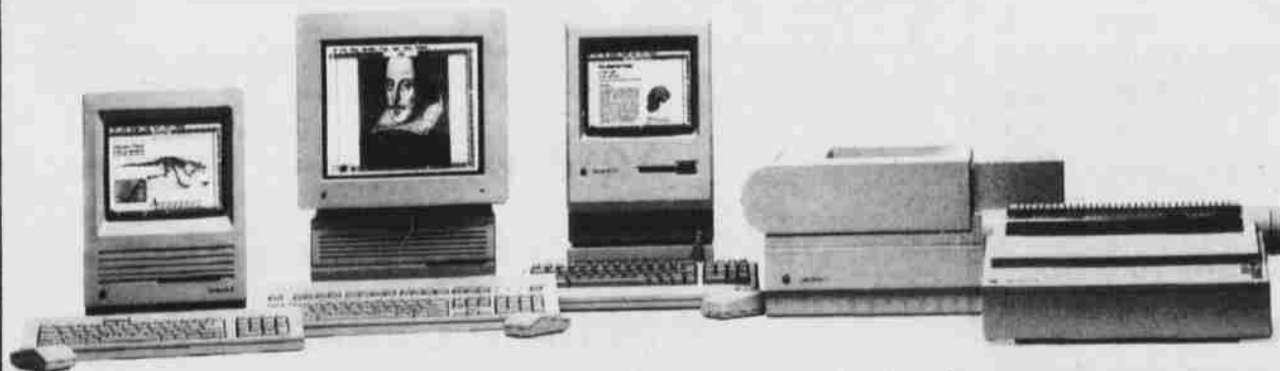
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