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Trade and human rights

Dear Mr. Editor,

It is all right for a government to choose to delink economics and politics and adopt a policy of pursuing "vigorously" trade with other countries "irrespective of their human rights records" (Globe and Mail, 12 May 1995), as Mr. Chrétien and his government are doing. But to justify the sacrifice of real concern for moral principles to the worship of the golden cow by saying that foreign trade is "the best way of spreading... democracy to the populations" of those countries is a sheer fallacy.

The West has been doing a lot of trade with China and Singapore, but democracy has not spread to the populations of those countries at all. This is an undeniable fact.

Elsewhere, the peoples of Eastern Europe and Russia are no longer suffering from the evils of communist dictatorship not because of a vast increase in trade with the West, but because those peoples, encouraged by international opinion, including strong support from the West, fought hard for democracy and had the courage to rise to defend it at crucial moments. Trade, and in particular trade with Canada, played no part in the spread of democracy to those countries at all. That, too, is an undeniable fact.

So, Mr. Chrétien and the Liberal Party may choose the policies they want. But they should not use fallacies and historical untruths to justify their disregard for the high moral principles which have always guided Canada in the past.

What is expected of the Government of Canada is not isolation of the countries concerned, but raising Canada's voice, not privately as if Canadians were ashamed of speaking in favour of human rights, but loudly, not in Beijing or Rangoon, but on Parliament Hill, to express shock and disapproval for the flouting of democracy in those countries.

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