

Annex Canada, Eh? Not So Fast

By Conrad Black

As a Canadian, I commend to American readers the desirability of avoiding unnecessary friction with that country. It is almost impossible to distinguish an English-speaking Canadian (as opposed to French Canadians – a little over 20 percent of Canadians), from an American from a northern state.



Prime Minister Trudeau and President-elect Trump at Mar-a-Lago. X.com

The audible difference is the pronunciation of a few words with the vowels 'o' and 'u' together in them such as about, and house. That is the cultural barrier between the two countries which has historically been as conveniently penetrable as our actual border. The United States-Canada frontier has not been crossed in either direction by hostile forces for more than 200 years, since the War of 1812.

Readers are also aware of my long-standing and strenuous, though not uncritical support of President Trump. In that

context, it is regrettable that he chose to express his grievances against Canada in the same statement and at the same level of retaliatory annoyance as his grievances against Mexico. Everyone remotely familiar with the problem is aware that Mexico has been severely implicated in what amounts to a barbarian invasion of the United States.

And most readers informed about international commercial matters are aware that Mexico has also been enticing American manufacturers to close their factories in the United States, relocate them with heavy subsidies in Mexico and there to employ cheap Mexican labor to fabricate Chinese parts and ship the combined products back into America with a corporate tax holiday in Mexico. It is an infuriating practice and I see nothing inappropriate in Mr. Trump's response to it. Canada is a fair-trading country, though, and does not engage in such activities and should not be put in the same category of American government disapproval.

Ours is as little abrasive a relationship as any two neighboring countries in the world enjoy, particularly as both are large, G-7, prosperous civilized democracies. Mr. Trump has made a number of amusing references to Canada's outgoing prime minister, Justin Trudeau, supposedly telling him that if the trade deficit between Canada and the United States was closed Canada would collapse. Mr. Trudeau cannot possibly have said anything of the kind, and if he did it is yet another reason why he is being bundled out of office in the next two months.

Nor is this deficit the \$100 billion to \$200 billion annually the president claims; the real amount is less \$50 billion but it should be remembered that most of Canada's exports to America are raw materials which are converted into finished goods, and many of those are then exported, including to Canada. The entire net trade deficit is not nearly as large or implacable as the president routinely claims. Canada, too, is the subject of his liking for hyperbole.

In his customary entertaining manner, the president concluded that if Canada could not survive without this supposedly colossal trade imbalance, then it should apply to become the 51st state of America. All who know Mr. Trump are familiar with his frequently uproariously amusing methods of advancing points he wants to make.

The relevant facts here are not only that the deficit is much smaller, not only that Canada would certainly survive the imposition of 25 percent tariffs by the United States, but that it would also reply to them and inflict as much financial inconvenience on as many Americans, though not as large a percentage of Americans, as would be inconvenienced in Canada by the president's threatened tariff increase.

Mr. Trump's chief complaint is the alleged influx of undesirable people from Canada to America. This is not remotely like the American southern border where 10 million to 12 million illegal migrants and possibly more poured in over the last four years. We are talking about a few thousand people, as Canada is a rich country and nobody flees from Canada. People do occasionally move for their own reasons and as a free country Canada does not restrain people from leaving.

Mr. Trump's grievance in these matters is not with us; it is with his predecessor. Canada is not East Germany and does not install a wall to keep Canadians behind it, any more than America does. If the United States is unhappy with people crossing the Canadian border, it is really up to it to reinforce that border as much as it wishes. Translating immigration into trade questions is sloppy policymaking.

Despite the similarity between most Canadians and most Americans and their language and appearance, there are distinct differences between the two societies. The United States has murder and violent crime rates between 150 percent and 200 percent above Canada's, and Canada would not wish to

emulate the United States in these matters. Canadians respect the revolutionary tradition of the United States and the fact that the country was created when many of its citizens took guns down from their walls and went out and rebelled against the British.

Canada has a different tradition and does not constitutionally guarantee the right of all adults to own a firearm, though in practice authentic collectors of firearms and those who need them for their livelihood such as farmers defending livestock, do have licensed firearms. As our traditions are different, though, Canadians do not wish to flood this country with guns or American welfare cases to receive Canada's higher benefit payments. Nor do Canadians wish to emulate the American plea-bargain system which provides a 98 percent conviction rate in federal criminal cases, 95 percent of them without a trial.

Throughout Canadian history going back to the founding of the country by Samuel de Champlain at Québec in 1608, there has been a thread of belief that has never been cut that we can make a somewhat different and a very good country in the northern half of this continent, and in general that is what we have done.

If America wishes to induce us to a federal union, to be taken seriously, it would require a proposal appropriate to a country with a larger area than the United States, even greater resources, and a well-educated and law-abiding and well motivated population one-eighth of that of the United States and not one-fiftieth as the reference to a single additional state implies. And it would be a federal voluntary union, not an annexation. No significant percentage of Canadians is seeking that, but if Mr. Trump's serious, he should make a serious proposal.

In that hackneyed old Madison Avenue phrase, "Run it up the flagpole and see who salutes it," if he wants, but don't compare Canada's conduct to Mexico's and Communist China's and

don't pretend that Canada is panting for admission to the United States, or that it can be absorbed like the admission of Puerto Rico or the acquisition of Alaska.

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