

Canada must retaliate over Biden's ill-considered Keystone decision

What is needed is a little strategic thinking in Ottawa

by Conrad Black



Canada absolutely has to retaliate for the outrageous and cavalier cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline. The millions of Canadians who celebrated former U.S. president Donald Trump's departure from the White House may start to wonder if the new era is quite as paradisiacal as they had expected. President Joe Biden promised to "rebuild our alliances," yet with no notice given to America's closest, oldest and least abrasive ally, with whose leader he is personally friendly, he revoked the existing arrangements and withdrew the permit to construct the pipeline, throwing 11,000

of his countrymen, and possibly as many as 40,000 Canadians, out of work.

Other executive orders that Biden issued in his first week in office reaffirmed his desire for a \$15 minimum wage and additional immigration of unskilled foreigners at a time when the United States is still attempting to reduce COVID-related unemployment. The Keystone decision was connected to the usual proclamation of incoming latter-day Democrats to generate vertiginous numbers of high-paying, unionized green jobs, manufacturing solar panels at uncompetitive prices after retraining disemployed energy workers. It all has the air of a hasty and ill-considered shotgun response to the various members of the ramshackle Democratic coalition that includes organized labour, ethnic minorities, the altruistically prosperous, radical ecological advocates, the media and the academy.

This is not going to work. The only thing Biden offers is that he is not constantly, and often irritatingly, in the face of the whole country every day on television, and tweeting, often provocatively, throughout the night. President Trump's policies were broadly endorsed by the congressional and state elections, but those who found him a trying or obnoxious public personality narrowly outnumbered the immense army of his admirers. Though Biden is almost certainly a one-term president for reasons of his age, health and possibly his politics, he has so far shown little indication of moving away from the far-left factions that comprise about 40 per cent of Democratic voters (according to Sen. Bernie Sanders, among the most high profile of the group), or that he is attempting to make common cause with centrist Republicans led by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. The Republicans can severely obstruct the adoption of the radical program that Biden has so far embraced and unless the new regime miraculously acquires the ability to turn American political custom and history on its head, the Democrats will not control the Congress after

the midterm elections next year.

The time for them to proceed with a feasible program is now. Instead, they are proceeding with one of the stupidest legislative initiatives in the history of the United States, and giving the spotlight back to Trump in a spurious impeachment trial in the Senate. The ex-president's counsel will trot out for the world to hear what the totalitarian media has been desperately trying to asphyxiate: the argument that the November presidential election did not produce an accurate result in the electoral college (though only Trump, with his customary mad hyperbole, imagines that Biden did not win the popular vote, the winner does not always do that). There is no chance of convicting Trump otherwise, and the current regime will make itself appear ridiculous if it lets this spectacle play out.

However this phase of what is still the Trump era plays out, Canada should get America's attention and exploit the fact that Canada, for good reason, is a well-liked and respected country in the United States and is recognized as causing America fewer irritations than any other major country. While there are obviously trade, cultural and foreign policy differences, Canada is always thoughtful and never offensive to the U.S. It is a scandal that we should be so shabbily treated as in the Keystone matter, especially since it is a carbon-neutral and environmentally safe pipeline and its cancellation will lead to more expensive and ecologically risky means of transporting oil, as well as economic hardship for hundreds of thousands of Americans and Canadians. If Canada does not respond now, it will be seen by all countries, and for a long time to come, as a doormat that can be cuffed about by any large country, including Russia and China, powers that much more often engage in such conduct than the United States does.

As economist Jack Mintz suggested in this newspaper on Jan. 20, Canada could impose tariffs on digital services provided

by the United States, which could be a serious inconvenience in that country and provide a useful incentive for Canadians to become more competitive in these high-growth economic areas. And we could also make it easy for the Biden administration politically by proposing the reaffirmation of the Keystone pipeline in the context of a continental environment agreement. Since it is economic suicide in both countries to attempt to abolish the oil and gas industry, however agitated the more febrile ultra-ecologists may be about them, we should certainly embrace the most environmentally safe transmission methods. This should also demolish what is left of the fantasy in which the Trudeau government has wallowed, that it can use Keystone as a placebo for the swaggering, Stetson-wearing oil addicts of Alberta, while pitching to their green supporters by blocking the east-west pipelines that would eliminate oil imports in the East and facilitate sales from the West Coast to China and Japan, all to the great economic benefit of the whole country.

The statesmanlike course would be to propose a continental environment treaty, including the revival of Keystone, while declaring an eminent domain that, with full environmental protection and generous treatment of Native people, would enable Central and Eastern Canada to be supplied with Canadian oil and the entire potential of oil and natural gas sales to the Far East to be realized by going ahead with both major proposed pipelines to the West Coast. For good measure, we should cancel the extradition treaty with the United States, since it convicts 98 per cent of people it accuses, 95 per cent of those without a trial, and does not qualify by Canadian or other civilized standards as, in criminal matters, a society of laws. And if Huawei acknowledges and partially compensates for its theft of intellectual property from Nortel, we should release Meng Wanzhou and return her to China.

The People's Republic of China is an odious regime, but that

does not mean we have to abase ourselves to please the United States and forgo great economic benefit by artificially reducing natural resource sales to China. What is needed is a little strategic thinking in Ottawa, but there is, on the basis of its record, little reason to expect that from this government. In fairness, it is difficult to repose unlimited confidence in the official or unofficial opposition on this point either. At least, if it is any consolation, we're not about to interrupt the business of Parliament to try to convict a former leader of the country of an incitement he did not utter to foment an insurrection he did not seek in order to remove him from an office he does not hold. Things could be worse, but that is no excuse for not making them better.

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