

Undermining Canada, Undermining the World

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PFP - C. L. Cook - Canada is ready to fall. Following years of backroom machinations with representatives of foreign corporations on all levels of government, national sovereignty has become an illusion. Recent moves to "harmonize" more of the nation's laws in preparation for the so-called North American Union are in an advanced state, yet still governments remain mum, and the media refuses to press the issue.

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C. L. Cook

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It's a process happening in Ottawa, and in the provinces, and it's accelerating. The April First enactment of the first stage of the Trade, Investment, and Labour Mobility (Tilma) deal between Alberta and British Columbia, ostensibly a "free trade" deal of sorts for inter-provincial trade, will ultimately usurp the local decision-making powers of municipalities in those two provinces, clearing the way for unfettered business development.

This is accomplished through a legal implement similar to the controversial Chapter 11 provision of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which holds government liable for lost business revenues due to environmental, or other regulations. This liability is for "projected" as well as real lost revenues.

That is to say: If a corporate entity feels it could have made X millions, (or billions) of dollars privatizing and selling the resources within the authority's area, but was denied that because of existing laws, then the authority is on the hook to supply those "lost" monies. The details of payment will be decided by a tripartite panel of industry and government stakeholders without public oversight or participation. As with the drafting of these agreements, settlements too are to be held in camera, beyond the purview of those who ultimately pay the penalties, the people.

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The Tilma provisions go one further than Chapter 11, disallowing municipal and regional development plans on such things as building height restrictions, heritage designation and, in British Columbia, denying the Agricultural Land Reserve, a system set up in the 1970's to protect dwindling farm lands from suburban sprawl. But, at its heart Tilma is designed to do what Chapter 11 too accomplishes, a manifest and insidious coercion of city councils and municipal boards to preemptively devolve legal protections and public priorities for fear of falling afoul of prohibitively large lawsuits.

In simpler terms, this is called: Blackmail.

Though Tilma will not come into full effect until 2008, giving municipal, city, and provincial governments the time they will need to shred and reconstruct all laws that they may, in Tilma's terms:

"...ensure that its measures do not operate to impair or restrict trade between or through the territory of the Parties, or investment or labour mobility between the Parties."

The chilling effects are already being felt, and local legislators are now beginning to question the wisdom of this course charted by the Premiers, without public consultation, that will effectively neutralize municipal governance in both provinces.

Beyond provincial borders, the deal is hailed as a triumph of Canadian good business practice and ballyhooed by the federal government as a model that should be adopted by all provinces, where they too should shred existing laws and regulations to make way for a wave of corporate investment and free flows of labour through "mobility."

Everyone Singing from the Same Hymn Book

As ominous to political sovereignty the portent of the looming full implementation, and perhaps spread, of Tilma is, some don't have to wait to see the rights of their home and native land erased. In British Columbia, the radical pro-business premier, Gordon Campbell, in the year

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2002, quietly signed into law a piece of legislation guaranteeing the pre-eminent right of business over the citizenry. Under the so-named 'Mineral Tenure Act' of 2002, according to Kendyl Salcito, of The Tyee, mining corporations, best represented in the province by massive, supra-national corporations, can stake a sub-surface mineral claim on-line, show up at your house, and start digging. No private property rights here.

Salcito records the rumblings coming:

"[...] last year the province created an online staking system that allows anyone with internet access and \$25 to acquire a miner's license and then, at \$0.17 an acre, buy mineral rights to land. It doesn't matter whether that land belongs to a neighbour, the Crown, or the "miner" himself. Once you own the mineral rights, you are free to "explore" your claims, wander the property, "poke at a few rocks," in the words of MP Tom Christensen. And once you decide to start drilling and digging, even the landowner's dwelling and buildings are at risk. That's the law under the Mineral Tenure Act as of 2002, when the section prohibiting miners from "obstruction or interference" with activities (or buildings) on private land was repealed."

In his, 'A Rancher's Radioactive Hell,' Salcito chronicles the battle between rancher Joe Falkoski and the Zena Capital Corporation, an outfit that showed up one day and began digging up Falkoski's [sic] land. Seems Zena Corp. is on the hunt for Barite, a mineral found in and around Kettle Valley.

The problem is: Kettle Valley's soil is radioactive, giving Radon readings, according to the B.C. Centre for Disease Control, that pose a threat to human health. No problemo for Zena though, thanks to Campbell's loopy laws, the digging will continue come hell, or green-glowing locals.

Barite is used to lubricate oil and gas rig drills, something infinitely more important to the well-being of Gordon Campbell's good friends in the mining community than the health of Kettle Valley villagers.

But it's not just in the wilds of the province that this kind of land grab can happen, (as witnessed by some wag who tried to push the point with the premier by staking a sub-surface claim on Campbell's own palatial Vancouver area property) no-one's land is exempt. In another case of land usurpation, Rob Westie's rural family home was invaded by a neighbour, he found wandering his land with a spray paint can, marking prospective dig sites. He then discovered he could do nothing to stop this trespass [sic] because a "neighbour" squatting and prospecting on the land adjacent had staked sub-surface exploration rights.

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Though Westie's MLA, Tom Christensen doesn't want to talk to him, or the press, B.C. Minister of Mining, Bill Bennett has a few choice words to share with Westie on the subject:

"[...] it probably comes as a big surprise to them that they don't own the rights under them. If they're moving up there then they are obligated to know what they're buying and what they're getting into... I can't help it if somebody moves up there with stars in his eyes and doesn't know what he's buying into."

The Minister adds:

"We spend a lot of your tax dollars on public education."

Thanks for that, Bill.

Kendyl Salcito notes, the "educational" materials necessary are housed in the Mining Ministry's 'Access Centre,' conveniently located in Cranbrook, about 400 miles from Rob Westie's embattled homestead.

What Wonders Await Us!

Westie's commute to Cranbrook should be made easier if the provincial government gets its way, and pushes through their 'Pacific Gateway Strategy;' the "plan" is to pave and plunder coastal B.C., allowing for massive road, port, and bridge infrastructure expansion; the idea being: B.C. as the central transit hub to expedite the delivery of cheap Chinese consumer crap to minimum wage warehouse outlets across Canada and its U.S. "prosperity" partner.

In Ottawa, Stephen Harper's agents are no more interested in the public weal than Bennett et al. In a "virtually" unprecedented act of anti-democracism, Tory Chair of the Commons Standing Committee on International Trade, MP Leon Benoit shut down the committee meetings in the middle of University of Alberta professor, Gordon Laxer's testimony regarding tenets of the Security and Prosperity Plan (SPP) signed by erstwhile Liberal Prime Minister, Paul Martin with George W. Bush and then-president of Mexico, Vincente Fox.

Laxer criticized provisions in the plan that guaranteed predominant access to Canada's energy supplies by the United States, regardless of Canadian needs. Calling the government's silence on the issue "reckless and irresponsible," Laxer said what the agreement means is Canadians left to "freeze in the dark" rather than let U.S. energy quotas be reduced.

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According to the Friday, May 11th Ottawa Citizen, it was at this point, Benoit "threw down his pen" and declared the meeting adjourned, before "storming out" of the room. The remaining Liberal members and the vice-Chair voted to continue the meeting, and record Laxer's testimony (absent government representation).

Committee member and NDP MP, Peter Julian expressed shock, saying:

"It's shocking the extent to which the Conservative party will go to cover up information about the SPP."

Also of concern to the remaining committee members: The recently announced intention of the federal government to "harmonize" Canadian limits on allowable pesticide residues found on produce; water export restrictions; and government secrecy surrounding the agreement.

For its part, the feds say they welcome "civil-society" groups to offer input.

Input Good - Output Bad

While the government welcomes your e:mail, they're not so crazy about civil servants returning the favour. Wednesday saw the arrest in Ottawa of Environment Canada media analyst, Jeffrey Monaghan, plucked from his cubicle and led out of his office in manacles by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

According to The Gazette, Monaghan was taken away for questioning about the leaking last month of the Tory plan to ditch Canada's commitment to the Kyoto Accord. The leak was particularly embarrassing for the newly minted Environment Minister, John Baird coming in concert with pointed criticism of the Conservative record on the environment from eminent Canadian scientist and broadcaster, David Suzuki, and former U.S. Vice-President Al Gore.

Jeffrey Monaghan was released by the RCMP without charge; then he was released from his contract with Environment Canada, terminated one day before his tenure was due to expire.

Monaghan called a press conference Thursday, where he called the police action a result of a

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"witch hunt" and lambasted the Tories, saying:

"What I can tell you is that the proposed charges against me pose a profound threat to the public interest."

Adding:

"[T]hey are without precedent. They are vengeful, and they are an extension of a government-wide communications strategy pinned on secrecy, intimidation and centralization."

Secrecy, Intimidation, and Centralization

A fittingly descriptive trio; the pillars of the wobbly stool that has become Western Democracy, defining exactly what modern polity has boiled down to under the auspice of America's leadership. Monaghan is not alone in his persecution; Friday also witnessed, as a parting act of filial devotion by departing leader of that other ally in George W. Bush's Global War on Terra, Tony Blair, sentencing of two government whistleblowers under Britain's Secrecy laws.

David Keogh, a Cabinet Office communications officer, and political researcher, Leo O'Conner were sent up the river for six and three months respectively for leaking the infamous memo of a meeting wherein George W. Bush seeks Tony Blair's opinion on the political expediency of bombing the Qatar headquarters of Arab media giant, al-Jazeera. (Blair didn't think it a great idea, apparently).

There you have a snap of the New World Order, ("odor" as one Rhymin' Simon friend of mine would have it) as it smells here in Canada, and abroad.

Writing of this glorious new world, ex-pat American, Chris Floyd observes:

"These are days of troubled sleep. As in a dream, you walk familiar streets, living out your ordinary life