

Canada's heroic energy industry will lead the way

The exploitation of native issues by the ENGO activists has been largely rubbish, but the best antidote is to translate the native interest into financial participation in the energy industry

by Conrad Black



I had the pleasure this week of attending a Canadian Energy Executives' Association (CEEA) annual conference in Banff, always an inspiring setting for any activity. When I was in the energy business many years ago (Norcen Energy Resources, originally the Northern and Central Gas Company), I often met with the Calgary energy establishment. In the mid-eighties they had the air of vintage explorers and promoters, swashbuckling oilmen of the old school, with a stylistic touch of Tex Ritter and John Wayne. In those times, the federal government of Pierre Trudeau was trying to take a large part of the profit from what was assumed to be a steeply rising

industry. The price projections in the National Energy Program of 1981 foresaw a quick, straight rise in the oil price, a golden rocket to pay for all the wealth and welfare-distributive dreams of the Pierre Trudeau government. The agenda was a combination of Pierre Trudeau's political *raison d'être* of fighting Quebec separatism with distribution of money in Quebec and smaller (Atlantic) provinces, and his Club of Rome, anti-growth and rather socialistic time-warp of the thirties and forties.

This policy made his regime a constant challenge: the indispensable man in saving Canada from the Quebec separatists was also an unregenerate social democrat who found the politics of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher incomprehensibly unattractive. He saved Canadian federalism by being out of step with the wider world, including economically renascent China.

Last week in Banff there was some reflection on the irony that where Pierre wanted to take the money from an industry that he regarded with fiscal greed, Justin Trudeau wants to shut down the same industry, which he regards as a threat to the environment and a menace to the inalienable rights of native people. Where Pierre Trudeau had begun his long incumbency as prime minister intending to fold what was then called the ministry of Indian Affairs, Justin has turned the country's pockets inside-out to unaccountable native leaders, and has pitched to those who imply that all who have come to this country after the natives have been illegitimate occupiers. It is difficult for me to express the extent of my respect for the resilience, buoyant morale, and sophisticated strategic response of the country's energy industry and of the new Alberta government to these challenges.

The Alberta government of Peter Lougheed (1971-1984), who was a red Tory who would have had a lot in common in some policy areas with Pierre Trudeau, responded fiercely to the National Energy Program, a severe fiscal imposition on the energy

industry and on his province, on fiscal and constitutional grounds. He did not attract as much support as he should have from the rest of Canada because Trudeau was able to portray Lougheed as a "blue-eyed sheik" where Trudeau was sharing the wealth, encouraging greater exploration, and waving the national flag. Now, the energy industry is fully mobilized and has refined its tactics very astutely. It is fighting for Canadian satisfaction of Canada's energy needs, an ecologically impeccable industry in which there is a substantial participation by talented and proven native and Métis leaders, including the impressive Stephen Buffalo and Gerald Auger. I had the opportunity of speaking with both of them, too briefly but very informatively (for me).

The motto for the conference was "Peace Love Energy" and the able minister of energy in Jason Kenney's new government, Sonya Savage, has set up a war room to develop the strategy of the energy sector in alliance with the industry to counter the entire coalition of interests and attitudes arrayed against them. Savage is a post-graduate academic authority on environmental questions and has a solid background in pipelines. She has engaged the distinguished former Postmedia journalist Claudia Cattaneo as the chief full-time strategist. The Alberta government and energy industry are preparing to return fire with the ENGOs (environmental non-government organizations) who have flooded the public consciousness with falsely negative misinformation about the effects of energy development on the environment, and with fables about renewable resources. There will be great emphasis on the advantages available to native people who are substantial economic participants, as executives and as owners of land, resource rights and transit rights.

As the CEEA kindly asked me to address them, I took it upon myself to say that they were not facing the persecution of their province and its chief industry alone, and that there were a great many, relatively silent Canadians who knew that

native and environmental issues were being unfairly amplified to thwart almost anything the energy industry attempts in the commercial interest of energy production and delivery, and in the national interest, of which energy is a vital component. It is possible to make and lay down practically leakproof pipelines. The environmental prohibitions on tanker exportation in our coastal waters are horse-feathers; there are almost never accidents with large tankers operated by serious ship owners. The supplementary argument about the tankers' affront to or demoralization of whales is risible foolishness that no accurately informed person would believe.

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The exploitation of native issues by the ENGO activists has also been largely rubbish, but the best antidote to them is to translate the legitimate native interest into financial and executive participation in the industry and showcase the competitive success of this form of boot-strapping the native community upwards compared to the extravagant victimhood industry endlessly touted by the federal government. Jason Kenney is a proven and agile political leader who would be the federal prime minister today if Stephen Harper had retired five years ago and not suicidally led his party through one of the longest and most inane re-election attempts of any Canadian government since John Diefenbaker tried to sell revocation of Canada's NATO obligations in 1963. (The main issues put forward by Harper four years ago to galvanize Canadians into re-electing him were Muslim face-coverings for females at public ceremonies and admitting the fewest Syrian refugees he thought he could get away with). But Kenney is poised now to fight a battle for all Canadians to end our national status as the world's greatest geopolitical chump for exporting 1.9 million barrels of oil per day, much of it at artificially low prices, while importing 600,000 barrels a day

because of the spurious objections to pipelining oil from Alberta to Toronto and Montreal.

The entire tenor of the CEEA conference was upbeat and devoted altogether to winning public and financial opinion in a rematch against the authors of the protracted oppression of the industry. Without a trace of self-pity and with little animosity toward eastern Canada as a whole, the Kenney government, in close co-operation with the private sector, is preparing to battle the animosity of those who have embraced confected ecological concerns and the phantasmagorical fears of some native leaders as the best methods of defeating capitalism.

Capitalism always will win eventually as the only economic system aligned with the universal human ambition for more. And it will incidentally prevail as the best way of spreading wealth and opportunity in native communities. There is little evident disharmony on these points with the Alberta NDP; the great Liberal party gained 0.08 per cent of the votes in the past provincial election. Our much battered energy industry, now practically deserted by foreign investors who rightly cannot abide the inanities of wavering Canadian federal official policy, will light the way for Canadian business and public policy.

First published in the