

Justin Trudeau's debacle of misgovernment



by Conrad Black

This column has often lamented the decline of Canada's competitive status as an economic and geopolitical power, and particularly our descent down the ladder of the world's nations in per capita income. Everything that could be done in this very fortunate country to make our nation less prosperous and less influential in the world is being done. Capital leaving Canada that was generated in this country has exceeded investment capital entering from outside by \$285 billion in the last nine years. The world is clawing at our door to buy our oil and natural gas but the present government, while inciting every conceivable pretext for refusing or harassing the construction of pipelines to get our oil and gas to world

markets, has clamped its lips around the gas-pipe of climate alarmism.

The climate is slowly changing, but Canada's contribution to the world's fossil fuel use is approximately 1.5 per cent and nothing we do will be of the slightest significance to the world. Large emitters like China, India and Russia will not allow the ecological nostrums of the West, which they regard as the mere hypocrisy of fully developed economies, to deter them from developing their own economies as swiftly as possible.

In addition, as eminent financiers Frank Giustra and Pierre Lassonde pointed out in a well-reasoned piece in the *Globe and Mail* on Monday, China is buying up as much as it can of the strategic resources that would be instrumental in any western drive to reduce our economic dependence upon coal, oil and natural gas. They make the point that in the last 20 years, Canada has lost Alcan, Falconbridge, Inco and Noranda to foreign buyers and has not remotely attracted the investment necessary to expand the development of resources necessary for renewable energy, such as cobalt, copper, rare-earth minerals, graphite, lithium, nickel and uranium.

Canada is richly endowed with much sought-after resources and is a global leader in mining expertise. But even the leading pension funds, some of which use their clients' savings and pension benefits to try to intimidate companies into joining them in belligerent and alarmist environmentalism, have only 25 per cent of their funds invested in Canada, and most of that in government bonds and real estate. They have 35 per cent of Canadian savings but have more money invested in China than Canada, and less than three per cent of their total assets are invested in Canadian public companies, down from 28 per cent in 2000. This is just hypocrisy (from a familiar source of it in ecological matters).

One of the most famous English-language commentators in the

20th century, Malcolm Muggeridge, famously referred to “the great liberal death wish.” In Canada, we could correctly call it the great Liberal death wish. Under the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, as I reported here on Jan. 20, the United States’ economy per capita grew four times as quickly as ours between 2016 and 2022, and per capita income in Canada is now effectively stagnant, with no early relief in sight. Between February 2020 and June 2023, public-sector jobs increased almost four times as quickly as private-sector jobs, while federal government spending has increased 75 per cent, to the point where the government is now spending \$11,500 annually for every Canadian man, woman and child.

Taxation is now a greater burden to the average Canadian family than the combination of housing, food and clothing, and Canadian public-sector debt has almost doubled since 2007. More than 60 per cent of Canada’s lowest fifth of income-earners have suffered tax increases in the last several years. And the green paroxysm has been a fiasco from every angle: the green economy is only three per cent of GDP and 1.6 per cent of jobs, and fossil-fuel consumption increased by nearly 60 per cent between 1995 and 2022. Our health-care system has effectively collapsed. Average wait times for surgeries increased nearly 200 per cent in 30 years to over six months, and Canada spends a higher percentage of GDP on health care than any of the 30 highest-income countries with universally accessible health-care systems.

It is clear that China aspires to become the world’s preeminent country. It is steadily claiming international waterways to be its own coastal waters and is threatening to suppress Taiwanese autonomy and democracy, as it did in violation of its treaty obligations with the United Kingdom in Hong Kong. The West is gradually forming a coalition of interests with China’s neighbours (except Russia) to produce a gentler form of the containment strategy that won the Cold War against the Soviet Union. It is based on adequate military

deterrence wherever necessary and spirited but peaceful political and economic competition.

Instead of playing its appropriate role in this, as Canada did through most of the Cold War, we have reduced our military, and the scientific research and sophisticated manufacturing that goes with it, to an anemic state. We went from being a country that sent a total of nearly two-million volunteers into the two world wars to defend the cause of freedom throughout the world when we were not ourselves under threat, to being the most egregious freeloader in the western alliance. We are failing in the great competition with totalitarian China, which the West will ultimately win, however inadequate our contribution.

Our response to China is self-induced economic stagnation, an insane green policy that imposes artificially high costs on our own population and kneecaps our greatest industry (oil and gas), as we increase our dependence on China for the strategic resources upon which a post-fossil fuel economy depends. It is an unimaginable trifecta of blunders: instead of enriching ourselves and strengthening the West by making the most of our immense natural resources, we are embarrassed by them and are thus keen to incapacitate our greatest strength. We wage war on our greatest industry to pursue an ineffectual green wild goose chase that will make us more dependent upon the West's great rival, whose dictatorial leaders do not wish us well and meddle in our affairs.

Not since 1963, when Prime Minister John Diefenbaker had a quasi-religious experience that convinced him of the virtue of unilateral nuclear disarmament and announced that we would renege on our NATO obligations and have sand instead of nuclear warheads in our high-altitude anti-aircraft missiles, has any Canadian government approached the present one in a triumph of stupefying strategic foolishness. In Diefenbaker's case, one could sympathize with his humanitarian concerns, and he was narrowly defeated in the election that followed within

a few months. We are now dealing with long-established economic, social, foreign and strategic policies, whose implications for the future and the reputation of this country become more dangerous every month. Nothing in our history has prepared us for such a debacle of misgovernment.

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