

Thinking the unthinkable about Canada's future

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In the eye-opening film *Hoodwinked: The Myth of Free Trade*, former Liberal prime minister John Turner reflects on the mid-'80s battle over the North American Free Trade Agreement. After a famous heated exchange with Brian Mulroney, Turner lost the battle for Canadian hearts and minds on the divisive trade issue – and their votes in the process.

Turner reflects on how, unlike most politicians, he had read the actual NAFTA agreement. After discovering an absence of binding agreements on such things as monopolies, antidumping, and labour standards, he decided the document had more to do with investment than “free trade.”

Cut to 20 years later. Iconic Canadian institutions like Hudson's Bay and the Laurentian Hotel chain have disappeared into the deep pockets of foreign investors. Provincially, it's more of the same. Texas-based Kinder Morgan owns BC's gas delivery system. One third of the operations and services of BC Hydro, our most profitable public company, has been outsourced to Bermuda-based Accenture. The BC Medical Services Plan and Pharmacare are in the hands of American firms. The CEO of the privatized BC Ferries hails from the US, where he presided as vice-president of Covanta Energy, which filed for bankruptcy protection in 2001.

Neo-conservative apologists in academia and media continue to applaud the high levels of direct foreign investment, federally and provincially, even though the bulk of it is in takeovers and acquisitions. Foreign direct investment has more than doubled in Canada since 1990. The Ontario governments' website boasts that “Canada puts no restrictions on the repatriation of capital or profit by foreign investors – one of the reasons the country attracts a high level of foreign investment.”

In a speech this January in Utah, former US vice-president Al Gore said “the election in Canada was partly about the tar sands projects in Alberta... and the financial interests behind the tar sands project poured a lot of money and support behind an ultra-conservative leader in order to win the election... and to protect its interests.” (Under Chapter 6 of NAFTA, Canada agreed to a “proportional sharing” provision. A fixed proportion of our energy supplies to the United States are guaranteed into the future. Even in the event of a national crisis, Canada cannot reduce the 65 percent of its oil and 61 percent of its natural gas which it now exports to the US.)

The suspicion that our nation is being bought out from underneath our feet, with complicit or ignorant silence of big media, appears to have little evidence to contradict it.

In fact, the disassembly of Canada is proceeding on several fronts simultaneously: economic, political, cultural and military. While South American nations are disengaging from the “Washington Consensus,” (the IMF/World Bank prescription for open markets

described by critics as a Trojan horse for keeping poorer nations in economic servitude), Canada's leaders are doing quite the opposite, bringing us into tighter orbit with the US. A number of informed commentators, among them former Progressive Conservative candidate David Orchard, Connie Fogal of the Canadian Action Party, Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians, and University of Ottawa economics professor Michel Chossudovsky, the overall plan appears to be nothing less than the elimination of Canada in all but name.

Citing publicly available documents, these critics foresee the replacement of Canadian public and private institutions with the cuckoo's egg of a militarized, branch-plant economy, with many of the traditional social welfare roles of government either eliminated or outsourced to private contractors. It's a choleric vision of a future that's two parts Orwell and one part Huxley, with a shrunken middle class toiling under the thumb of a borderless corporate oligarchy, and monitored by unrestricted electronic surveillance.

In her paper *The Metamorphosis and Sabotage of Canada*, Connie Fogal writes "This union is planned, directed, organized and coordinated by unelected, unaccountable people of the military/industrial complex with a few academic apologists thrown in for good measure. It is being facilitated by all three elected governments. This is the same military/industrial complex that General Eisenhower warned against. This group is creating a despotic regime for the pursuit of their interest (rapacious greed and power) which is diametrically opposed to the needs and interests of the citizens in all three countries. Their plan is to make all of North America their power base acting in their interest only."

Fogal doesn't mince words on the elites' end game for Canada. "It is the end of a nation. It is the end of decisions by ourselves over ourselves. It is a reduction of our standard of living: a decline of the middle class, an increase in poverty, homelessness and destruction of our social safety net. It is the militarization of the country. It is the creation of a police state."

Extremist rhetoric from a fringe commentator? Whatever the overall nature of the game, it's undeniable that over the past two decades, an alphabet soup of organizations and agreements have smoothed the path for Canada's absorption into a single North American bloc, with public policy largely dictated by nonelected officials.

The Canadian Council of Chief Executives is the nation's premier business association, composed of the top executives of 150 leading Canadian firms. Formed in 1976, the CCCE promulgated the development of the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement, and of the subsequent North American Free Trade Agreement. Concerned that fortress America might retreat within its own borders after 9/11, disrupting Canada-US trade, the organization successfully pressured Ottawa to bring Canadian military and security policies in line with those of the US. A "common security perimeter" serves interests that are not just economic. The CCCE's petitioning had the enthusiastic endorsement of the military lobby.

According to Michael Chossudovsky, another piece of bureaucratic DNA for Canada's militaristic mutation came with the formation of the Bi-National Planning Group. Accountable neither to the US Congress nor the Canadian Parliament, the BPG's role transcended electoral governance, and as the name suggests, the BPG had members in both countries. The organization's role was to negotiate Canada's entry into the US Northern Command (Northcom). Its work now largely completed, BPG expired this spring and Canada is now positioned to sign on with Northcom.

Michel Chossusdovsky writes that “Canada’s participation in the Bilateral Planning Group and hence the Northern Command implies Canada’s acceptance not only of Star Wars, but of the entire US war agenda, requiring significant hikes in Canada’s defence spending. The latter are intended to fuel the military-industrial complex. Canada’s defence contractors are supportive of this process.”

One should not think of this as a partisan issue, or a phenomenon brought into being solely by the famously American-friendly Harper government. The federal Liberals have danced to this tune for some time, and the cross-border tango of mutual interests remains the same, even if the political venues have changed. It’s true that Prime Minister Chretien offered resistance to the more extreme aspects of this wheeling and dealing, as did Paul Martin (ie refusing to join in Star Wars and the war in Iraq), but it also appears the leaders’ public antiwar stance proved incompatible with the overall pursuit of economic and military ties with the US.

The Independent Task Force for North America, organized by the business elites of the US, Mexico and Canada, was lead by Canada’s own former Liberal deputy prime minister, John Manley. Last spring, Manley’s task force released its Trinational Call for a North American Economic and Security Community by 2010. A united continental bloc will share a common approach to trade, energy, immigration, law enforcement and security.

Also in March of 2005, Prime Minister Martin, President Bush and Mexican President Vicente Fox signed the Security and Prosperity Partnership agreement, which is the general agreement on “deep integration’ between the US, Canada and Mexico. According to Fogal, the leaders then assigned three cabinet ministers in their respective countries to implement the deal, among them David Emerson, then Liberal minister of industry.

Emerson’s bureaucratic role in the US-Canada relationship may explain his high value to the Harper government, if indeed his role transcends any partisan considerations. His primary role may be not so much governmental as extra-governmental. This offers an explanation for Emerson’s change of allegiance from Liberal to Conservative within hours of the federal election. Hence his shock at the post-election outcry from his nominal constituents, who had the audacity to believe that voting means something.

The meeting of the “Three Amigos” in Cancun last March (Bush, Fox, and Harper in his Empire-friendly military jacket) was simply more of the same. The media focused on the photo ops, while politely failing to mention the particulars of the meeting. The silence was in large part due to the fact that deep integration is proceeding with the ignorance of most elected representatives. According to Jerome R. Corsi in a report in WorldNetDaily.com, working groups in all three nations are busy turning the Security and Prosperity Partnership agreement into reality. Determining the names of the officials involved in the working groups has proved to be difficult.

So is this all just a conspiracy theory, a paranoid extrapolation from the US/Canada “business-as-usual? Corsi refers to a task report by The Council on Foreign Relations which presented a blueprint for expanding the SPP agreement into a North American Union that would merge the US, Canada and Mexico into a superstate/trading bloc. “The CFR task force report called for establishment of a common security border perimeter around North America by 2010, along with free movement of people, commerce and capital within North America, facilitated by the development of a North American border pass that would replace a US passport for travel between the US, Canada and Mexico.”

“Also envisioned by the CFR task force report were a North American court, a North American inter-parliamentary group, a North American executive commission, a North American military defense command, a North American customs office and a North American development bank.”

Sceptics may ask, so what’s is the big deal? Canada has to be “competitive” in the New World Order, and if lumbering dinosaurs like The Hudson’s Bay Co. can’t compete with neighborhood-nuking behemoths like Wal-Mart, you can’t stop globalization, right? And if we join the US missile defence shield and sign on to Northcom, don’t we stand to benefit from shared security? Again, we are being offered the polarities of economic stagnation versus global competitiveness, and civil rights versus police state safety – even though these represent false choices manufactured for us. Once we join Northcom, according to University of Ottawa economics professor Michel Chossudovsky, Canada’s “borders will be controlled by US officials and confidential information on Canadians will be shared with Homeland Security.” The bi-national arrangements will allow US troops and special forces to enter Canada, he says. “ Canadian citizens can be arrested by US officials, acting on behalf of their Canadian counterparts, and vice versa.”

In this respect, the difference between the federal Liberals and Conservatives on these matters is one of degree rather than kind, although Chretien’s principled stand on Iraq looked better than the knees-to-the-floor submissiveness of our current crop of Quislings. Ottawa’s new regime has an enthusiasm for US domestic/foreign policy that is startling in its transparency. Harper has abandoned Kyoto, spoken of Canada’s “activist judges,” resumed the attack on gay marriage, barred reporters from photographing caskets returning from Afghanistan, and picked up the habit of ending speeches with a Republican-like “God bless Canada.” At this stage in the game, the Tories appear to have little concern about making their intentions plain. Their apparent sense of immunity from the press and the people is in itself alarming.

Michael Chossudovsky asks if annexation of Canada is part of Bush’s military agenda. If anything, it is annexation by committee. The absorption of Canada into a North American superstate is happening incrementally, although it has sped up considerably in the past few years. There is no need for Bradley fighting vehicles to roll across the border. With the thorough integration of the Canadian and US economies through NAFTA, and a common military command and control structure, Canadian sovereignty will cease to exist by definition.

Only political players like Fogal and David Orchard are discussing abandoning NAFTA, allowed in the agreement itself by either nation with six month’s notice. So why have none of the major parties touched on the issue of deep integration during the election campaign, or afterwards in the House of Commons? Even the NDP has taken a strangely see-no-evil, speak-no-evil stance. The silence not only highlights the high-level secrecy surrounding deep integration, it also speaks volumes of our traditional political parties and the sorry state of our big media. There is very little debate in print, policy circles and in Parliament over the common security perimeter, or the mooted North American border pass with biometric identifiers. A single economic space, at last freed of all environmental and labour constraints, seems to have all the appearances of a done deal.

Yet the most worrying aspect of the regime change in Canada involves a threat to those much-vaunted “freedoms” that others supposedly hate us for.

In June, Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day revealed that last year law enforcement agencies allowed their “helpers” to commit a broad spectrum of crimes. According to Vancouver Sun reporter Ian Mulgrew, these included “gun offences, passport forgery, counterfeiting, possession of stolen property, and theft over \$5,000.” Mulgrew notes that “after 9/11, Canadian law enforcement agencies were given carte blanche to break the law if necessary... as it stands now, police, park wardens, fisheries officers, custom officials, jail guards and their agents are immune from prosecution for virtually anything short of obstructing justice, non-consensual sex or violence.” And abuses of power aren’t likely to go reported, due to the all-purpose rationale of “security.” Incredibly, the February 2002 immunity law is still on the books. With the recent arrests of alleged terrorists in Toronto, there will undoubtedly be greater enthusiasm to enlarge police powers at the municipal and provincial levels.

If you still doubt the depth of Canada’s transformation, consider how quickly our role in Afghanistan went from “peacekeeping” to an open-ended, indefinite war in Central Asia against the “destable murderers and scumbags” described by General Rick Hillier. The General told The Globe and Mail “this is a 10 year mission - minimum.” Yet one ever asked the electorate if the expansion of our military role overseas was desirable or even sensible. In the House of Commons, MPs were allowed only one “note-taking” debate on the matter, with no opportunity to vote. This is not the behaviour of representative democracy, but rather of a totalitarian-lite proxy state.

Manipulating people by fear and uncertainty is a time-tested way to get democratic citizens to deconstruct their own civil institutions, and quietly assume the roles of prisoners and prison guards. Is it time to start using the “f” word for both Canada and the US? As we look into the political abyss, are we seeing the darkening signs off fascism?

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